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# THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE

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THE BOOK OF GENESIS

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The aim of THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE is to preserve all that is worth preserving of the modern interpretation of the Bible. It is the thought rather than the expression that is retained, though the expression has not been rejected when it seemed worthy. So much, however, has been done in the way of condensing, re-arranging, re-writing, adding to, and illustrating, that the sources have not as a rule been given. But so far as these are published sermons, they will be found in the Index to Modern Sermons which accompanies each volume. THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE contains also much that is new, written by the Editor and others.



# THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE

## THE BOOK OF GENESIS

### INTRODUCTION

1. WHAT should we do without the Book of Genesis? Let us imagine the blank that would be left in our picture of the beginnings of time, and of those far-off relations and movements of peoples which ushered in the history of Israel. Through that history came the Old Testament, essential to the understanding of the New, and already, in the stories of Israel's ancestors, the main lines of the future faith are marked out. True, we no longer turn to Genesis, as those before us did, for the dogmas of either religion or science. The 'conflict' which once raged so bitterly between Genesis and geology no longer disturbs us, though an echo of it may still be found in those who would claim (quite mistakenly) that the 'days' of the first chapter are geological epochs, so leaving room for the idea of a slow evolution, in harmony with scientific speculation. It is really a great gain to have learnt that the Bible was never intended to be an esoteric text-book of modern science, though its cosmogony and cosmology do represent the knowledge and beliefs of the times in which Genesis was written. Not less is the gain that the modern theologian has ceased to find proof-texts in Genesis for his system of theological doctrine, for example in the story of the sin of Adam and Eve. The educated man of to-day does not turn to Genesis even for an authoritative history of the earlier generations; he has come to recognize that myth and legend and the orally-told traditions of tribes and families are always the necessary forerunners of history in the proper sense of the term. How great an advantage it is that the mists of the morning should have cleared away, and that the great and permanent truths of religion should shine forth with undimmed light—the truths of the divine creation and

conservation of the world, of the divine providence over-arching man's life like the sky, of the tragic issues of evil which may spring from man's heart and destroy his good, and of the gathering up of all human lives into one vast purpose which is seen to give unity and meaning to history itself! In all these, the Book of Genesis remains the true and essential introduction to the Bible and to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The best way to begin the study of Genesis is to read through it rapidly, as a continuous whole. This is not a platitude, for far too many students of the Bible substitute books about it for the Book itself, or content themselves with pleasing snippets from it. This continuous reading should be done preferably in some unfamiliar and modern translation, such as Moffatt's, or Meek's (in *The Bible: An American Translation*, edited by J. M. Powis Smith and E. J. Goodspeed, Chicago, 1935) or T. H. Robinson's (in *The National Adult School Union Translations—Genesis*). Such a reading need not take more than three hours, and if it is attentive and thoughtful enough it will leave a definite impression of the Book as a unity, to be kept in mind when we are further studying its details. The more successfully we can put aside our prejudices and conventional associations the more valuable will this reading be. It should reveal to us not only the fascinating art of Hebrew story-telling, concrete and vivid by its details, yet simple in structure and comprehensive in horizon; our reading will also show the purpose of God in creating the earth for man's habitation, in patient renewal of His endeavour through Noah, when human sin had defeated the first phase of it, in the elective concentration on a single family, called in



Abram, and destined to develop into that chosen nation which should be God's chief instrument of revelation to all the nations of the world, 'whose are the fathers, and of whom is Christ as concerning the flesh' (Rom. ix. 5). The reflective reader cannot fail to be impressed by the way in which God is able to transform the consequences of man's evil into good, as in the story of Joseph, who says to his brethren (l. 20): 'ye meant evil against me; but God meant it for good.'

2. This fully justified impression of general unity in the scheme of the present Book of Genesis should not, however, have hidden from the reader many perplexities of detail, which could hardly be found in any book written at one time and by a single author. In some instances, for example, the same event, or series of events, is described more than once. The majestic account of the Creation in the first chapter, which culminates in the creation of man, is followed by the very different narrative of the second chapter, which puts the creation of man before that of the animals. The story of the Flood raises such difficulties as that Noah is said to have taken here one pair of all land animals, and there, seven pairs of 'clean' and one pair of 'unclean' animals into the ark (vi. 19, vii. 2), and that the duration of the Deluge is given as forty days and nights in vii. 12, and as one hundred and fifty in vii. 24. Abram is said to have passed off Sarah as his sister in Egypt (xii. 11 ff.); a similar story is told of him when in the territory of Abimelech (xx. 2 ff.). In the narrative of the events which brought Joseph to Egypt Reuben at one point takes the lead, persuading the rest to leave him in a pit; passing Midianites draw him up and take him with them. Yet alongside this account there is another, to the effect that Judah persuaded the others to sell him to Ishmaelites (xxxvii. 21 ff.). When the differing strands of such narratives are distinguished and studied with close attention to detail (especially in the Hebrew text), they usually display marked differences of vocabulary corresponding with those of the subject-matter. The most familiar example of this is the occurrence of two differing names for God, namely, Elohim and Yahweh. Patient work on these lines (for which the commentaries should be consulted) has enabled scholars to analyse the Book of Genesis into

three principal sources, besides a number of smaller elements.

The oldest of these sources, denoted by the symbol J, is that using the name Yahweh (Jehovah) for God. It constitutes (roughly) chapters ii.-iv., substantial portions of vi.-xiii., xv., xvi., xviii., xix., xxiv.-xxvii. (with exceptions), parts of xxviii.-xxx., xxxii., xxxiii., xxxvii.-xxxix., xliii., xlv., most of xlv. 28-xlvii. 31, xlix.-l. 11. The approximate date for the composition of this source is 850 B.C., and its special interests in place-names and tribal traditions suggest that it belonged to the Southern Kingdom.

From xx. onwards, in xxi., xxii., part of xxviii.-xxx., nearly all xxxi., part of xxxii., part of xxxv. and xxxvii., nearly all xl.-xlii., xlv., part of xlviii.-l., there is a parallel but somewhat later document, to be dated about 750 B.C. and probably arising in the Northern Kingdom. This narrative is known as E (from its use of the term Elohim to denote God); one of the characteristics suggesting later origin than that of J is that it is less 'anthropomorphic,' less naïve in its general conception of God and of His relation to men. These two narratives appear to have been combined (JE) prior to their incorporation in the Pentateuch. They run through it and beyond it, apparently as far as the records of the monarchy. They supply the most vivid and picturesque parts of Genesis; indeed, if the modern reader were to make an anthology of the stories which interested him most, this would, to a large degree, correspond to the JE document.

The remainder of the Book of Genesis (apart from some special sections) supplies its present literary framework. This is known as the Priestly document (P), from its characteristic features, and it is the latest of the three documents in literary composition (c. 500 B.C.). It includes the first chapter, which so carefully avoids the anthropomorphism of the second, the genealogies of v., xi., xxv., xxxvi., xlv., a narrative of the Flood (now combined with that of J), a narrative of the covenant with Abraham (xvii.) and of the purchase of the burying-place at Machpelah (xxiii.), and many minor passages which help to give unity to the Book in its present form. One of its characteristic formulæ is 'These are the generations of . . .' (ii. 4, v. 1, etc.). Like J and E, P runs on through the Pentateuch, its special interests



being in institutions (for example, circumcision, Gen. xvii. 10 ff.), genealogies, and ritual law. The name for God employed by P is the same as that of E, namely, Elohim, and in the earlier stages of literary criticism P was not distinguished from E. But its vocabulary and more formal character and contents are now seen to separate it sharply from both J and E.

Special sections of Genesis, which seem to have had a separate origin, are the account of the conflict of the kings in which Abraham was concerned (xiv.) and the poem, or rather series of poems, known as the 'Blessing of Jacob' (xlix. 3-27). Other poems incorporated in the narratives are the 'Song of Lamech' (iv. 23 f.), the 'Curse' and 'Blessing' of Noah (ix. 25-27), the oracle about Rebekah's unborn twins (xxv. 23), and the two 'Blessings' of Isaac (xxvii. 27-29, 39, 40). Such poems often belong to the earliest forms of oral tradition, being easily remembered and becoming the nuclei of narrative, as did, later, the (poetic) oracles of the prophets and the sayings of Jesus.

3. Formal or literary analysis is, however, only one kind of Biblical criticism, though essential to the adequate interpretation of the Bible. The resemblances and differences of the two accounts of the expulsion of Hagar (xvi. 4-14, xxi. 6-21) cannot be explained till it is seen that two documents (J and E) are involved. But purely literary criticism has to be supplemented by historical criticism, dealing with the contents of the documents and their historical value. Here comes in the aid of archaeology and the comparative study of religions, together with all the relevant external evidence as to the times to which the literary documents relate (as distinct from the time of their composition). The literary form may be late, yet it may record more or less faithfully a tradition which goes back to much earlier times, possibly employing also earlier written documents. In regard to Genesis, our task under this head has two clear divisions, the first dealing with the pre-historic period covered by i.-xi., the second with the stories of the patriarchs (xii.-i.).

A comparison of the first eleven chapters with the mythological stories through which many peoples explain the origin of the world and of men is likely to convince us that much in these chapters belongs to the same class.

This is notably true of the accounts of Creation and of the Flood, for which we fortunately possess more or less close parallels in the ancient Babylonian mythology—that of a people racially akin to the Hebrews, and of a people whose ideas were widely diffused in Palestine at the time of the Hebrew settlement. The seven tablets of the Creation myths take us back at least as far as 2000 B.C. They tell of the *primæval* monsters, Apsu and Tiamat, from whom sprang the gods. But the parents of the gods resented the new order by which these were replacing the original chaos, and Tiamat created an army of monsters with which to destroy the gods. These, through their leader Ea, destroyed Apsu and then commissioned Marduk to take up the battle with Tiamat, promising him rich rewards if he prevailed. Marduk is invested with the power of the creative Word, and arms himself for the fray. By his control of the winds he slays Tiamat and divides her body into halves. One of these he makes into the solid 'firmament' which retains the waters above, and on it he builds a heavenly place. Of the other half (at least according to the later form of the myth) he makes the earth. He creates the heavenly lights and eventually man (from his own blood) to be the worshipper of the gods.

At first sight there may not seem much resemblance between these crude conceptions and the chaste and sober account of Creation in the first chapter of Genesis. But more explicit references in the poetry of the Old Testament (e.g. Ps. lxxiv. 12-17, lxxxix. 8-12, Job xxvi. 12, 13) show us that we are on the right track, and echoes of the old tale survive in such details of the Genesis story as the Hebrew name for 'the deep' (*tehom*, Tiamat), and as the *ruach* (wind or spirit) of God which hovered or moved upon it. Obviously, the Hebrew story is of much higher moral and religious quality, the difference going far beyond the substitution of the name Elohim for that of Marduk. Amongst the Hebrews, all through the Old Testament times, the cosmological framework of the Babylonians was taken for granted—that of a flat earth supported on mountain pillars, with Sheol in its depths, and surrounded with the waters which had been reduced to subjection, whilst over it was the solid firmament on which stood the palace-temple of God (cf. Ps. xi. 4, xxix. 9).



In all our reading of the Old Testament, even of its most exalted spiritualities, we must imagine human life as set within this primitively conceived framework.

The Babylonian Flood myth is much closer in detail to its Hebrew parallel. In the most complete form of it (part of the Gilgamesh Epic), Utnapishtu (the Babylonian Noah) living by the Euphrates, is warned that the gods in their anger are bringing a great flood upon mankind. He is instructed by a friendly god to build a roofed ship, to cover it with bitumen, and to store animals and all necessary supplies within it. When the rain-storm begins, he and his family shut themselves in. The waters cover the earth and even the gods are afraid. When at last the waters subside, the ship grounds on a mountain, and Utnapishtu sends out in succession a dove, a swallow, and a raven, the last not returning. He then offers sacrifice on the mountain :

The gods smelt the sweet savour.

The gods gathered like flies over the sacrifice.

The resemblances are obvious, but also the differences. The Hebrew story has again been purged of much that was unworthy of the divine, and moves on a much higher level of moral and religious thought.

As we might expect, there is no real parallel in Babylonian mythology to the story of man's temptation and fall. But, in general, incidental details here and elsewhere correspond to the widespread attempts of primitive men to explain certain features of their life and culture which puzzled or interested them. The myths in Genesis i.-xi. are primarily attempts to answer such questions as these : Why has man to work hard to get the fruit of the ground ? why must women suffer in child-birth ? why do men die ? why does the serpent crawl, unlike other animals ? why do men wear clothes ? why do some tribes wander about ? who was the first to make musical instruments, tools, weapons ? how did the fabled giants arise ? who introduced the cultivation of the vine ? what is the meaning of the rainbow ? why were the Canaanites (ultimately) reduced to serfdom by the Hebrews ? why are there great towers (like the Babylonian *ziggurat*) ? why do men speak different languages, so that they cannot understand each other ? The natural way to

answer this 'General Knowledge Paper' was that still found all over the world amongst primitive people—and children—namely, to tell a story about each of them. Such are the myths and legends with which the Bible begins. We have something to learn in both sympathy and humility through God's employment of such material as a medium of divine revelation. For, when God speaks to man, He must speak in a language man can understand, and must adapt Himself to the intellectual needs and limitations of each successive generation.

The second and larger part of the Book of Genesis, from xii. onwards (to which the first part has been made introductory), concentrates on the story of Israel's ancestors in the remote days before the settlement in Canaan. Of the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the second is little more than a link, whilst the stories of the other two are told in considerable detail. To compensate, however, for the relative unimportance of Isaac, we have the story of a fourth patriarch, Joseph, to whom no less than fourteen chapters are devoted (xxxvii.-l.). Apart from the natural interest of the Hebrews in those who were believed to be the ancestors of the later nation, there are certain *motifs* in the present form of these stories which claim the reader's attention. First, there is the religious interest in God's direct concern with this chosen line of descent. The purposeful activity of God is made evident from the beginning, in Abraham's call (xii. 1-3). The working out of this purpose is seen in the divine providence, closely controlling the fortunes of the family. The migrations of Abraham from his Mesopotamian home, through Haran into Canaan and thence to Egypt, into the 'Negeb' (Southland) and up to the neighbourhood of Bethel and Ai (where Lot leaves him), southwards again to Hebron and eventually by way of Kadesh and Shur to Gerar in the land of the 'Philistines,' thence to Beersheba (from which he visits the mountain of sacrifice, Moriah, of unknown site) and finally to Hebron again, where he remains until his death (xxv. 8 f.)—in all these journeyings he is watched over and cared for by God, who stands in intimate personal relation to him and his affairs. There could be no better illustrations of this than the story of the intended sacrifice of Isaac (xxii. 1-19) and that of the mission of his steward to find a wife for Isaac from his own kin (xxiv.).



Similarly with Jacob, to whom at Bethel the promise to Abraham is renewed (xxviii. 13-15). He prospers in Paddan-Aram, despite the jealousy and enmity of Laban, whom God forbids to interfere with him (xxxi. 24). The wrestling with a divine figure at Peniel is made to show that frowning Providence may conceal a smiling face; the story in its present setting shows what can be done with some primitive legend of a river-demon when it is transfused with a higher truth. The narrative of Joseph is a prolonged interpretation of life in terms of its divine control, showing how God can make even the wrath of men to praise Him. The boastfulness of the boy and the jealousy of his brothers, the slave who became a saviour (like Naaman's Israelite maid, or Ireland's St Patrick), the purity that brought penalty, yet through it the opportunity to become Pharaoh's viceroy, the bringing of Joseph's people to Egypt and the installation of his two sons amongst his brothers as forerunners of leading tribal groups—all these are brought into the comprehensive purpose of God, and minister to its fulfilment. Thus has the truth of divine providence, embodied in a tale, entered in at many doors which would have remained closed to the philosophy of theism.

A second, though subordinated, *motif* in the patriarchal stories is to claim the promised land in advance of the actual settlement. This is done in a number of ways, besides the explicit promise to Abraham at the outset (xii. 1 f.). Canaan is described to Jacob as 'the land of thy sojournings, which God gave unto Abraham' (xxviii. 4; cf. xvii. 8). The purchase of the cave of Machpelah, on which so much stress is laid (xxiii. 17 f., xxv. 9 f., xlix. 29 f., l. 13), and Jacob's purchase of ground at Shechem (xxxiii. 19) stake Israel's claim to 'real estate' in more than the legal sense. In particular we note how ancient places, and especially sanctuaries, in Canaan are linked up with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for example Shechem (xii. 7) a place between Bethel and Ai (xii. 8, xiii. 3 f.), the 'terebinths' of Mamre (xiii. 18), Beerlahai-roi (xvi. 14), Beersheba (xxi. 31, xxvi. 25, 33, xlv. 1), Jehovah-jireh (xxii. 14), Bethel (xxviii. 19, xxxv. 7), Galeed and Mizpah (xxxii. 48, 49), Mahanaim (xxxii. 2), Peniel (xxxii. 30, 31), Succoth (xxxiii. 17), El-elohe-Israel (xxxiii. 20). The solemn blessing of Abraham by Melchizedek in the name of his own

(Canaanite) deity also points in the same direction. From the time when God first called Abraham out of his heathen environment (Jos. xxiv. 2), Canaan is destined to belong to his descendants.

Apart from these main lines of the story, there are also certain episodes suggesting an independent interest and origin, even though they are now interwoven into the pattern of the whole narrative. One of these is xiv., describing the battle of the kings, in which Abraham intervenes to rescue Lot and meets Melchizedek. Others are the treacherous attack of Levi and Simeon (Levi being still a secular tribe) on Shechem (xxxiv.) and Judah's family relations (xxxviii.). Further, we notice throughout the natural interest in related peoples of the Semitic stock (already differentiated from other lines in ch. x.)—Moab and Ammon (xix. 37, 38), Ishmael (*i.e.* the Beduin tribes, xxv. 12 ff.), Esau (Edomites, xxxvi. 8 ff.). The 'Blessing of Jacob' (xlix.) is of particular interest and importance, since it enumerates and characterizes the ancestors of the 'Twelve Tribes' of Israel, a schematic and artificial division which reflects the course of the subsequent history and tribal groupings (the 'Blessing' should be compared with the tribal enumerations in Deut. xxxiii. and Judg. v.). The different origins of these ancestors from the two wives and the two concubines of Jacob epitomize some aspects of the subsequent history. Of the Leah tribes (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun) Judah is singled out as the source of the future line of Davidic rulers (xlix. 10). Of the Rachel tribes (Joseph, Benjamin), Joseph (*i.e.* Ephraim and Manasseh, destined to form the main body of the predominant Northern Kingdom) is shown as populous and prosperous. It is significant that the 'concubine' tribes, Gad and Asher (Zilpah), Dan and Naphtali (Bilhah) belong to the circumference of both the geography and history of Israel.

4. What is the historical value of these patriarchal stories? In trying to answer this difficult and disputed question, it should be remembered that there is no external corroboration of them. The fourteenth chapter appears to make contact with contemporary history, but nothing is known of any such campaign of the four kings against the five, and the

identification of the names is very uncertain. If 'Amraphel' is Hammurabi, the episode would date Abraham about 2000 B.C. The recently discovered Ras Shamra tablets contain the name of Terah, the father of Abraham (Gen. xi. 24), but in them he figures as a divine hero, linked with the moon and carrying out a victorious invasion of the south of Palestine. Here we are evidently in the realm of mythological legend, even supposing that common historical facts underlie both occurrences of the name. The Hyksos, the so-called 'shepherd-kings' who established themselves in Egypt from before 1700 B.C. to c. 1580 B.C., were indeed Semites, and the name Jacob-el occurs, but they afford no clear contact with the story of Joseph's supremacy in Egypt, for which there is no evidence in Egyptian records. The Tell-el-Amarna tablets supply very important information about the conditions in Palestine, c. 1400 B.C., and describe the invasion of it by the 'Habiru,' who may be the Hebrews at some early stage of their relation with the land. But these tablets tell us nothing about the patriarchs, and the picture of Palestine they offer is very different from that pre-supposed by the patriarchal stories.

It will be seen, therefore, that we are thrown back on these stories themselves, in making any judgment as to their historicity. The variations in their parallel forms already illustrated remind us of the long period of oral transmission through which they have probably come to us. This necessarily involved constant remodelling of the less essential or less salient features of the story, though it does not preclude substantial accuracy in regard to the core of the tradition. Such stories may, in particular, as Doughty found amongst the Beduin Arabs of recent times, be good evidence of tribal movements. To link these to some form of genealogical scheme is a natural mnemonic for wandering people, who have no access to, or capacity for, the record by writing which might be simultaneously in use amongst settled and more developed peoples. Such stories, at any rate, are first-class evidence of the beliefs of those amongst whom they circulated, and they may become, as in Israel, of permanent and classical significance for the later structure of religious faith and moral ideals. But we must not confuse them with documented and critically tested history, how-

ever much material they indirectly supply to it.

On the whole, therefore, it is reasonable to suppose that Israel counted amongst its ancestors such individuals as these, and that they faithfully illustrate in general the simple life of the past in an environment which brought little change from one generation to another. The recorded incidents are more or less typical. The general trend of the stories, such as the migration of Israel's ancestors from 'Ur of the Chaldees' through Haran into Palestine and Egypt, doubtless corresponds to the actual course of the history, just as does the genealogical scheme of 'the table of nations' (x.), though this is subject to criticism of details in the light of modern knowledge of linguistic and other affinities. The kinship ascribed to individuals (for example, Moab, Ammon, Ishmael, Esau) agrees with tribal and national groupings, and is, in fact, intended to set them forth. In all these narratives we must bear in mind that important feature of ancient thought known as 'corporate personality'—the conception of a whole group as summed up in its representative, and the easy transition from the one to the many, and from the many to the one, which affects every department of law and religion. Naturally such stories assumed the actual existence of their heroes, since this blood-tie of a group was its most obvious explanation. But behind the single figure there was always the consciousness that it epitomized the whole group thought to be descended from it, so that Esau, for example, is always potentially the Edomites. This trait comes out particularly in the 'Blessing of Jacob,' which must have been framed in days when tribal characteristics and fortunes had already established themselves.

The ordinary reader will doubtless continue to treat these patriarchal figures as 'historical,' and he is justified in doing so, because his concern is with a larger conception of 'history' than the mere historicity of detail which we expect from a chronicle. When we read the great tragedies of Shakespeare, we are not concerned with the precise degree of historicity attaching to the figures of Lear, Othello, Hamlet, and Macbeth, but with the truth of the life-portraiture. A portrait, as distinct from a mere photograph, has more or less of the artist embodied in it, but we judge its success by its



ability to bring out those aspects of reality which the eyes of the artist have discerned. So it is with that long unknown line of unconscious artists who have fashioned for us the portraits of the patriarchs. We know instinctively that the result of their unconscious art is true to life in the deepest sense. Part of this truth, and for the Hebrew genius the most essential part, is the relation of the human life to the divine. So these human lives (and with the patriarchs we may take the personal figures of the first eleven chapters) become the concrete embodiment of moral and religious truths.

5. What are the chief truths which the stories, in their present setting and unity, most clearly convey?

First of all must be set the conception of God as revealed in His contacts with men. Here we must remember that the literary record of Genesis extends from the ninth to the fifth century B.C., the period of greatest development in the history of Hebrew religion, because that of the great prophets. As we study the documents in their chronological order, it is as though we stood in the dark room of the photographer, watching the development of a photographic plate till the emergence of the full picture. At first, we see God working on His clay like a potter, shaping a human figure and blowing into its nostrils the breath which shall animate it; we are told of God walking in the garden in the cool of the evening breezes, or we see Him when He has come down from above the sky to visit Abram and to ascertain what men are doing on earth (xviii. 21). At long last, we see no man-like form at all, but we hear a transcendent voice, breaking the silence of chaos with the words, 'Let there be light.' Even so, that unseen speaker is conceived as having a form like man's, for does He not say, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness' (i. 26 f.)?—the very terms used about the resemblance of Adam's son, Seth, to himself (v. 3). However majestic may be the ultimate conception of the transcendent God, such anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms are inseparable from religious imagination, and indeed underlie even the most abstract philosophic speculation. If God be not in some sense akin to us, we can never receive any revelation from Him, for there will be no common language. We could not even speak

of a divine 'purpose,' for that belongs to the language of the time-order and implies human psychology.

This divine being is revealed as Creator. The question whether He creates by shaping an ordered world out of a pre-existent chaos, or 'out of nothing,' is hardly in the mind of the writer of the first chapter. It is sufficient for him to assert that everything which counts for anything in the life of man has its source in divine activity. That is an essential doctrine for Biblical religion. The later guarantee that God can be an effective Redeemer was based on the doctrine that He has already been an efficient Creator (Isa. xlv. 24 ff.). The Bible affords no ground for the modern idea of a limited God; as the limits of man's horizon expand, so does the idea of God and the sphere of His activity. No doubt the doctrine of Creation at one point of time is paradoxical for the thinker, since time itself belongs to the created order. It may be that creation in time should be regarded as the necessary symbol of an eternal divine activity, that of One who keeps no Sabbath rest from His labours, since in Him at all times we live and move and have our being. (It should be noted that in Ps. civ., the poetical parallel to Gen. i., the continual maintenance of all living things is ascribed to God—see vv. 27–30.) But in some form or other, the doctrine of the divine creation of the world, so nobly enshrined in the opening chapter of Genesis, remains an essential part of Christian theism.

This divine Creator is also the Controller and Governor of the world. Whatever measure of freedom He has given to man, He does not cease to watch the result of the experiment sympathetically, and to intervene effectively whenever things get out of hand. He expels the guilty pair from the privileges of Paradise lest they abuse them further. He swiftly punishes the first murderer. When heavenly beings themselves contribute to the corruption of the earth (vi. 1–4), He destroys its inhabitants by a universal flood and starts afresh with the rescued Noah. He thwarts the insolence of the tower-builders, purges away the evil-doers of Sodom and Gomorrah, whilst delivering Lot, cares for the homeless Hagar and her son, watches over the fortunes of Abram and his descendants, brings Joseph into Egypt to fulfil there His beneficent purpose. We should be

grateful for this richly detailed picture of One who stands in such close, intimate, and warm personal relation to His people and indeed to mankind.

The practical question in the minds of those readers of Genesis who have assimilated its primary teaching will be this—can we still believe in such divine providence, now that God seems to be doubly removed from us, first by the conception of a vast universe in which there is no crevice for His entrance, no place for His dwelling; and second, by the apparent contradictions to the doctrine offered by history and private experience? The first of these difficulties could not arise for the Biblical writers; their primitive cosmology saved them from it. The second did, and as the problem of innocent suffering and guilty prosperity it takes a central place in the thought of Israel from Jeremiah's time onwards, till it received its supreme statement and only answer in the Cross of Christ. In regard to the first, it may be asked whether our fuller knowledge of 'second causes' does really provide a self-sufficient universe or even affect the real issue. The number of links in the chain of divine control does not matter, provided the end of the chain be in God's hand. Even in Genesis Nature has a life of its own; it responds to the divine command and purpose, as in the cursing of the ground for the sake of Adam, or its blessing for the sake of Joseph (xlix. 25 f.). To believe that all things and all men are in the hand of God does not require the accompanying belief that God must come down from heaven to earth in quasi-physical form to control them. The challenge to faith in divine providence is real, but neither its strength nor our answer to it depends on the changing forms of our knowledge and thought. The challenge is severe because of the predominance of material over spiritual interests, and the consequent weakness of our spiritual imagination, on which depends the quality of moral steadfastness and religious loyalty. That is where the stories of Genesis can still help us, by their vivid pictures, to share its essential faith in an effective and beneficent Creator and Ruler of the universe.

The existence of God was never challenged by Hebrew thought, but His 'righteousness' was often questioned, *i.e.* His conformity with the standard or norm to be expected of Him. Already in Genesis that finds striking expression

—in the dialogue between Abram and God about the fate of Sodom, and particularly in the question, so often to be urged in Israel's chequered history, 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' (xviii. 25). It is taken for granted that God's conduct ought to be worthy of Him; the trouble, here as in the Book of Job, concerns the application of the principle. This faith in God's conformity to the right standards also underlies the important conception of the 'covenant' made with Abram. In xv. 18 (JE) the covenant is based on the ritual of sacrifice; in xvii. 7 ff. (P), where it is linked with circumcision, it becomes an intensified form of the divine promise. But in either case the stability of the covenant ultimately rests on the righteousness of God, to which faith must ever return for its own confirmation.

6. Over against this conception of God there is that of man. In the primitive story he is essentially a body of flesh, animated by a breath-soul (ii. 7), not (as in the Greek conception) essentially a soul, temporarily dwelling in a body. Thus we ought not to speak of a 'dichotomy,' and still less of a 'trichotomy' (spirit, soul, flesh), for the term 'spirit' had become simply a higher synonym of 'soul' by the time of the priestly writings (vii. 15); in the pre-exilic period it was not an established psychical element in man's constitution at all, but an 'energy' such as might be added to a man from without (originally demonic, afterwards divine). The real Hebrew duality is not that between body and soul, but that between man as 'flesh' and God as 'spirit' (Isa. xxxi. 3, with Duhm's reference to 1 Cor. xv.; cf. Gen. vi. 3). As flesh, man has no natural immortality; he is indeed removed from Eden lest he should acquire it (iii. 22-24). When he dies, it is not his 'soul,' but the ghostly replica of the whole man, which passes, shadow-like, into Sheol (xxxvii. 35, xliv. 29, 31), his body, the essential personality in life or in death, being buried 'with his fathers' (xlix. 29). Thus, in Genesis, there is no hint of any real life for man beyond death. That is one reason for the intensity of Hebrew experience within the present life—a life so well worth living, as it seemed to the Israelite, in spite of all its burdens and sorrows. The somewhat gloomy view of civilization in i.-xi. does not disprove this statement; the sombre tone is derived from the view taken of man's moral



conduct, rather than from any rejection of the 'goods' of life. It would not be fanciful to see here a parallel to the prophetic recall to nomadic simplicity and virtues; the animal offering of Abel the shepherd is preferred to that of the agricultural and therefore more 'civilized' Cain; the price of viniculture is drunkenness (Noah).

The place of man in the created order is fully in harmony with that assigned to him in the eighth psalm; he is supreme over the animals and subordinated to God alone. He is from the beginning on probation, and the supreme issues of his life are moral, as we see in the testing of Adam and Eve, Abram (xxii.), Joseph (xxxix. 7 ff.). It is the general failure of mankind to meet this test and the growing moral corruption of the world which brings the Flood, though this ushers in a new experiment through the descendants of Noah, with a more patient acceptance of the situation on God's part. How far was this corruption due to sources other than man's misuse of his freedom? The serpent (not yet to be identified with the devil, as first in the Wisdom of Solomon, ii. 24) is itself one of the world's inhabitants, and simply provides an occasion for human sin, though treated as morally guilty. The 'sons of God' who fall in love with the daughters of men (vi. 1-7) add to the corruption of mankind, but are not yet conceived as the primary cause of it. Man as man is master of his fate, always within the control of God. Biblical religion never loses its grip of the fact of man's moral freedom, however strong its confidence in God's ultimate supremacy.

God expects man to render to Him the dues of worship, as the many patriarchal altars (of JE, not P) indicate. This worship centres in sacrifice. This point is explicit in the command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (xxii.), in the sacrifice accompanying the divine promise to him (xv. 9 ff.) and in the agreement ratified between Laban and Jacob (xxxi. 54). God makes known His will to man in vision (xv. 1), or dream (xxviii. 12 ff.), but may appear in human form (xviii.). He also expects from man such obedience as that of Noah, such faith as that of Abram, such persistence in seeking His blessing as that of Jacob. On the other hand, there is no explicit condemnation of Abram's lying to Pharaoh and to Abimelech, of his harshness towards Hagar, of Jacob's

dishonest cunning in regard to both Esau and Laban, of Joseph's shrewd 'corner' in wheat and the exploitation of it; they are rather presented as part of the normal life of the times, and are indeed used to further the divine purpose.

7. All great literature, sacred or secular, gathers to itself the experience and fresh insight of the subsequent generations. They discern new meanings and make new applications of that which has once been wrought out in memorable phrase or story. Honest and informed exegesis must, indeed, always try to distinguish the original and historical meaning from this after-growth, even when it has become part of 'orthodox' religion, like the Pauline doctrine of 'original death,' or the Augustinian doctrine of 'original sin.' Nevertheless, these later developments should be taken into account, if only because they often show the unsuspected depth and suggestiveness of the original. Few books can be richer in such development of meaning than Genesis, since it supplies a beginning for all things, illustrates the cardinal doctrines of the divine personality and providence, and portrays man's divided heart and tragic surrender to evil. The power of Genesis to hold and stimulate man's thought can be seen in the Book of Jubilees, a pre-Christian amplified version of Genesis, in the homiletical and moral expansion of its supposed meaning in the Jewish Midrash (Genesis Rabbah), in the Hellenistic speculations of the *Poimandres* (cosmogony and the origin and fall of man), to say nothing of the many echoes of the substance (not the form) of Genesis in the prophets, psalmists and wisdom writers of the Old Testament. It is enough to turn over the pages of the Jewish Prayer Book to see how deep has been the influence of Genesis on the worship of the Synagogue. So, also, on the conceptions of the Christian Church; the New Testament is the setting forth of a new creation, as St Paul makes explicit in 2 Corinthians iv. 6: 'it is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' The Epistle to the Hebrews (xi.) summarizes the narrative of Genesis in its enumeration of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph as examples of faith. Jesus gives a deeper significance to the

sexual relation of man and woman by His use of Genesis ii. 24 (Matt. xix. 5). The prologue to the Fourth Gospel obviously borrows its majestic opening from that of Genesis. These are but a random handful of examples of the influence of this book.

To follow the use made of Genesis, with ever varied turns of meaning, down the Christian generations would require many volumes, and to the influence on Christian theology we should have to add that on Islam, for which Abraham is hardly less notable than for Judaism; it was his 'pure monotheism' that Muhammad claimed to be reviving. In the boundless field of modern literature, the most familiar example of the influence of Genesis on poetry is seen in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, whilst Haydn's *Creation* parallels this in the sister art of music. The approach of the modern man to the Book is subtly conditioned by many such influences. It requires a real effort to disentangle the original meaning. But when we have done this we ought to recognize that the greatness of a story or a phrase lies not least in the undertones and overtones which it is able to evoke in its own later history. We can feel grateful for Charles Wesley's great poem, 'Come, O thou Traveller unknown,' without confusing its range with the story of Peniel that inspired it, and we can gain from the poem a deeper consciousness of man's ever recurrent struggle with a foe who may become a friend. Or, if we turn from such a dramatic scene stamped on our imagination to the obscure detail that may have escaped our notice, how suggestive is the passing reference—in the midst of what is to us an arid genealogy—of the Anah (xxxvi. 24) 'who found the hot springs in the wilderness, as he fed the asses of Zibeon his father'! It is the same Spirit of God who guided men into first telling and then writing down such things, who can use

them still to touch *our* spirits finely, to fine issues.

8. *Some useful books for the further study of Genesis.* There are two full-scale commentaries in English, of first-class quality, namely, S. R. Driver's in the *Westminster Commentaries* (12th ed., 1926) and J. Skinner's in the *International Critical Commentary* (2nd ed., 1930), where references to foreign literature, including H. Gunkel's important commentary, may be found. W. H. Bennett's 'Genesis' in the *Century Bible* (n.d.), is the best brief commentary.

For fuller particulars of literary analysis, *The Hexateuch*, edited by J. Estlin Carpenter and G. Harford-Battersby (vol. ii., Text and Notes [1900]) should be consulted; for a briefer conspectus, see *Pentateuchal Criticism* by D. C. Simpson (2nd ed., 1924) and *An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament*, by W. O. E. Oesterley and T. H. Robinson (1934).

For the subject-matter, the *Cuneiform Parallels to the Old Testament*, translated and edited by R. W. Rogers (1912), gives a useful selection of Babylonian material. For the more recent developments in archaeology, see W. F. Albright's *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (1940). For the comparative study of religion, reference should be made to the relevant articles in the *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics* (1908–1921), edited by James Hastings. C. M. Doughty's *Arabia Deserta* (1888) is invaluable for the nomadic background and for Semitic ideas in general. A general view of the Old Testament and its teaching will be found in two recent books, namely, *Record and Revelation* (1938), edited by H. Wheeler Robinson, and *A Companion to the Bible* (1939), edited by T. W. Manson.

H. WHEELER ROBINSON.



## GOD THE CREATOR

Gen. i. 1.—'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.'

MORE than twelve centuries ago, when as yet there was no Bible in English, a Saxon boy, a cowherd, lay asleep in the stable of the famous Abbey of Whitby. As he slept a glory seemed to fill the stable and a Voice spoke to him saying, 'Sing, Caedmon, sing some song to Me.' 'But,' said Caedmon, 'I cannot sing.' 'Yet shalt thou sing of Me.' 'What shall I sing?' 'Sing the beginning of created things.' So the Spirit of God came upon Caedmon and he sang:

Now must we praise the glory of Heaven's Kingdom,  
The Creator's might, and of His mind the thought,  
The glorious Father's works, and how to wonders all  
He gave beginning, He, the Eternal Lord!

In some such way as that, at some place and time far more remote, the Spirit of God came mightily upon the sacred writer as he mused, and inspired him to sing this hymn in praise of the Creator and all His wondrous works. For the first chapter of Genesis is to be read and understood as a hymn of praise, a far-off echo of that celestial hymn, when in the freshness of Creation's dawn 'the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy.'

It need not surprise us to discover that the writer wove into his hymn more primitive material which in some degree coloured his language and influenced his mode of thought. For, from the first, man must have pondered the mystery of the heavens and the earth and sought to explain their origin. We know that in Babylon and throughout the Ancient East there were traditions about the Creation handed down from prehistoric days, traditions which resemble the Bible narrative in language and outward form though not in their religious spirit. Why should it be thought to detract from the inspiration of the sacred writer that he used the thought-forms of his day and the traditions of the past to aid him in conveying to men the truth as revealed to him by God?

It is no disparagement to Shakespeare that he took the rude tales of the past and transformed them into the supreme creations of his poetic genius. So is it with the Babylonian traditions of Creation when compared with the narrative in Genesis. In these you have the crudest polytheism with grotesque wars of gods and monsters; in Genesis all that is absurd and grotesque is eliminated, no trace of polytheism is left, and the narrative opens with the majestic utterance, to which no parallel is found in any other account: 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.' No utterance more manifestly inspired is to be found in all the Holy Scriptures.

Some in our time have asked why should not the Creation narrative have been expressed in terms of modern science? This is illustrative of the folly and conceit of our generation which naively regards itself as the only generation worth considering and its science as the final truth. Why should a preference be given to our generation and to our science? We forget that by and by we too shall be ancients and our science antiquated. One of the most profound thinkers of our time has well said, 'The certainties of science are a delusion. . . . Whenever some new mode of observational experience is obtained the old doctrines crumble into a fog of inaccuracies.'<sup>1</sup> The sacred writer had to speak first of all to the men of his own time in language which they could understand, and further he had to speak eternal truths which never grow old for the guidance and salvation of all the ages which were to come. By this divine purpose his work is to be appraised. 'It still speaks to us as no other record of the origin of things can do. It strikes a higher and more august note; it plumbs lower depths of feeling; it finds us in a more secret place of the soul than anything that ancient philosophers or modern scientists can tell us.'<sup>2</sup> 'As the first great Hymn of Creation, it must ever maintain an imperishable place in religious literature. No advance of science can antiquate its teaching. Science may fill in the details of

<sup>1</sup> A. N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 198.

<sup>2</sup> E. Griffith Jones, *The Ascent through Christ*, 77.

the process. But only the Bible can declare with authority that evolution is but the natural side of God's creation.<sup>1</sup>

What are these eternal truths which are here so impressively enunciated by the inspiration of the Divine Spirit for our guidance and salvation?

1. In the first place, *God, the Self-existent, the Author of all being*. 'In the beginning God.' There we reach a point beyond which it is impossible to travel in thought or imagination. Man's insatiably questing mind cannot rest in anything short of the ultimate. He strives to discover what underlies the universe and sustains all existence. In ancient times, when men were baffled by the mystery of things they took refuge in myths, such as that the world rested on the back of an elephant, which in turn stood upon the back of a tortoise. That, of course, left unanswered the question, on what did the tortoise stand? Such myths may seem to us childish, but is it any less childish to assert, as some moderns do in the terminology of a pseudo-science, that the world is explained by 'an infinite regress of causes,'—which is just as much as to say that if the telegraph wire were only long enough there would be no need of an operator at the far end. There must, of necessity, be some Ultimate existing in its own right, some Cause of all, which is itself uncaused.

What can we know of that Ultimate, that uncaused Cause? Science cannot help us here. As Sir Oliver Lodge says bluntly, 'Let us admit, as scientific men, that of real origin, even of the simplest thing, we know nothing.'<sup>2</sup> Professor Ray Lankester is equally emphatic. 'The whole order of nature is a network of mechanism. . . . But no sane man has ever pretended, since science became a definite body of doctrine, that we know or can ever hope to know, or conceive the possibility of knowing, whence this mechanism has come, and why it is there.'<sup>3</sup> Man can only speculate that there must be some Artificer of the heavens and the earth, some Wellspring of being whose outflow supplies all the energies of matter and life and mind.

To this Ultimate the sacred writer gives the

great name of God, and thereby lays the first stone of that edifice of revelation which is crowned in Christ. He speaks with assurance, He offers no proof. Proof, indeed, there is none, and in the nature of the case there can never be. For if you seek proof of God from anything outside of God you thereby make Him derivative; when you try to go back beyond the beginning you declare it not to be the beginning. Nowhere in the Bible is any proof offered of God. He is everywhere taken for granted. And that is as it should be. There must be some ultimate ground of existence, some absolute origin. In answer, then, to the question, What was in the beginning? the Bible affirms the great name of God. And that answer commands the assent of the universal human heart. For men in all ages have believed in God, not through any logical proofs, but through what has been called the primal instinct of the *numinous*, an inborn conviction that God is. And men have never disbelieved in God save where they have suppressed this instinct, and in their perversity of heart have bemused themselves with the subtleties of a false philosophy.

2. The second great truth here revealed is that *creation is the work of God*, the whole creation the work of the one and only God. 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.' That sublime utterance stands as a bulwark against many errors. Here is no conflict of gods and dragons such as the Babylonian traditions tell of. Here is no dubious wrestling between powers of light and darkness as some have supposed by way of explaining the evil that is in the world. Here is no doctrine of emanation such as has been held at many times and in various forms. That would imply that the world was the product of some inevitable change in the godhead, and that the world is as necessary to God as God is to the world. Nor is any countenance here given to matter as pre-existing and providing the rough material for the Creator's work, so that He is not in the full sense the Creator but only the Artificer who gives shape and order to the chaotic mass, and perhaps, as some modern writers have taught, only a struggling and evolving God who had not yet succeeded in shaping the rough material to His mind. Against all such errors the Bible proclaims the Creator's absolute transcendence as well as His immanence. God

<sup>1</sup> A. R. Gordon, *The Early Traditions of Genesis*, 140.

<sup>2</sup> in *Ideals of Science and Faith*, 27.

<sup>3</sup> *The Kingdom of Mankind*, 62.



is not dependent on the world in the sense that the world is dependent upon God. There is profound truth in the oft-quoted lines of Emily Brontë :

Though earth and man were gone,  
And suns and universes ceased to be,  
And Thou were left alone,  
Every existence would exist in Thee.

The Bible pictures Creation as a movement of the Spirit of God issuing in the utterance of a creative Word. That is to say God willed the world to be and the world came into being. 'God said, Let there be light, and there was light.' The creative act is by us inconceivable, for it is unique and there is nothing else to which it can be compared. Sir James Jeans says if you wish a picture of Creation you may imagine the Creator stirring the ether with His finger! Apart from the fact that this assumes a pre-existent ether unaccounted for, the gross anthropomorphism of the image forms a sad contrast to the unapproachable sublimity of the sacred writer. As it has never been surpassed, so, we may be sure, it will stand for all time as the most worthy expression in human speech of the ineffable mystery of Creation.

To say that the world came into being by the will of God implies that it continues to exist by a continual exercise of the same will. This involves the doctrine of *creatio continua* which Descartes took over from the mediæval thinkers, that 'the preservation of a substance in each moment of its existence requires the same power and act that would be necessary to create it, supposing it were not yet in existence.'<sup>1</sup> Therefore God is immanent in the world, sustaining it, as our Lord said, 'My Father worketh hitherto,' and if He should cease to exert that sustaining will the whole world would instantly cease to be. This striking thought becomes more easily comprehensible in the light of the most recent teaching of physical science which declares that matter in the last analysis consists of pulsations of energy. So we find Bernhard Bavink, one of the best informed scientific writers of our time, expressly declaring that 'in the literal sense, not a single quantum of action exists in the world which does not proceed *directly and immediately* from God.' And this, he adds, gives new significance to St Paul's

<sup>1</sup> *Meditations*, iii.

words, 'In him we live, and move, and have our being.'

The Creation narrative in Genesis has been fiercely assailed in the name of modern science, and the belief is widely held that Evolution is a substitute for Creation and presents a truer picture of the method by which the world came to be. It should be understood that Evolution does not touch the question of Creation. Darwin began his work at the point where the earth was in existence with life upon it, and his whole aim was simply to explain the means by which, as it seemed to him, living things multiplied. He never attempted to explain the origin of life, still less the Creation of the universe. Then as to the order in which living things came to be, the evolutionist is not nearly so confident as he once was about the details of his picture. As Professor Bateson said in the Darwin centenary volume, 'evolutionary orthodoxy developed too fast, and a great deal has to come down.'

It cannot be too plainly stated that such discussions are quite foreign to the purpose of the sacred writer and do not touch the religious truth on which alone he set value, namely, that the whole world came into being and exists by the will of the Creator. If, in answer to a child's question, 'Who made me?' the answer were given, 'God made you, and He made the flowers and the trees, the sun and the moon and the stars,' how irrelevant and pedantic it would be if a critic were to interpose and say that you were giving false teaching to the child because the sun was created before the trees and the flowers! The Bible writers of a later time never run off into such side issues, and it is remarkable that they pass by as irrelevant the very things that provoke modern criticism. They lay no stress on the order of created things as if it gave them a divinely revealed cosmogony. To them the one thing of supreme importance was that 'by the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.' As a modern astronomer has finely said, 'The first chapter of Genesis is no handbook of science, no epitome of the course of evolution. It is the revelation of God. "God said," "God saw," "God created," "God called," "God made," "God appointed," "God divided," "God ended," "God rested," "God blessed and sanctified."'

3. That leads naturally to our last point, that as the world was created by the word of God, even so it *exists solely for the glory of God*. The Shorter Catechism, as is well known, begins with the noble answer that 'man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever.' That is a note which is continually struck throughout the whole Bible. Let all created things glorify their Creator—sun, moon, and stars, all on the earth and under the earth, 'Let them praise the name of the Lord, for He commanded and they were created.' So through the ages runs the holy chant, till the seer in the Apocalypse beholds the representatives of all creation falling down before the throne, saying, 'Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power, for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created.'

This is a mood which is strangely foreign to the modern mind. The typical man of to-day is not humble, reverent, worshipful. He does not readily think of himself as one of God's creatures, made to glorify God. On the contrary he sees himself as the climax of a long evolutionary progress, and daringly dreams that 'he is the master of things.' This optimistic faith has been severely shaken in recent days, but the natural man stoutly maintains his independence. His whole view of the world is anthropocentric. He takes for granted that 'man is the measure of all things,' and he does not hesitate to judge the works of the Creator from that standpoint. God, if He is to be acknowledged at all, must first stand at the bar and plead His cause and justify His ways with men. It is His business to help and bless, to forgive errors and avert misfortunes, and in general to make man's life like one of those happy functions at the end of which the reporter can say that 'a good time was had by all.'

We seem largely to have lost that feeling of lowly reverence which would make us conscious that God is our Maker, that He is in heaven and we are on the earth. There is another striking phrase in the Shorter Catechism, which speaks of 'God's sovereignty over us and His propriety in us.' God is not only our Sovereign Lord, but our Proprietor. We belong to Him for the simple reason that He has made us. There is a profound sense in which man, the creature, has no standing and no rights as against his Creator. When St Paul says, 'Nay

but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?' he has been criticized as if he ended the argument with a club. But what else can we say? Man, the creature, has no independent standing as against his Creator. All that we have and are is from Him—not merely our physical structure and the environment in which we live, but the brain with which we think and the moral feeling with which we judge. If we have any relative independence of thought and action that also is His gift. So it becomes us to 'kneel before the Lord our Maker,' reverently confessing that we are created beings brought into existence by the will and for the glory of our Creator.

It is written that 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,' and certain it is that nothing is more needed in our modern religion than a deeper and more reverential fear of God. Without that we cannot gauge aright our place in the world which God has made, nor truly apprehend the infinite grace of God our Saviour. For it is against the tremendous background of the omnipotence and glory of the Creator that His infinite condescension and grace in Christ is seen to be so amazing as the Bible represents it to be. That the Highest should stoop to the lowest, that God, being what He is, should so love a world like this that for our salvation the Word was made flesh, the Lord of glory became the servant of all and took upon Himself the sin of the world—surely this might well be counted incredible, but, being accepted in glad and humble faith, it becomes an endless theme of wonder and of praise.

J. H. MORRISON.

## Light in Our Darkness

Gen. i. 3.—'And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.'

THE inspired writer is describing the gradual formation of the world as a home for man. Its condition was at first chaotic—a wild, dreary waste of stagnant water; a vast desolate expanse which presented no feature on which the eye could rest. 'The earth was without form, and void'—in which there was nothing



that could be distinguished or defined—‘and darkness was upon the face of the deep.’ That was the picture! But He whose office it is to create and to sustain does not leave the Divine handiwork in this condition of hopeless gloom and despair. The Divine Breath begins to ‘move’—or to brood like some bird hovering over its young—with all His quickening energy, ‘over the face of the waters.’

Darkness profound  
Cover’d the Abyss; but on the watery calm  
His brooding wings the Spirit of God outspread,  
And vital virtue infus’d, and vital warmth,  
Throughout the fluid mass.<sup>1</sup>

Then at last God speaks: and when God speaks, ‘it is done.’ Things do not emanate from Him unconsciously; they come into being through an act of His *will*. Each stage in the process is the realization of a plan deliberately formed in the Divine mind. Chaos disappears by being transformed into a cosmos where the reign of law prevails; and the grim shades of night are chased before that glorious sheen of sparkling splendour which fills God’s universe with all its wealth of gladness and of glory. ‘And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.’

1. Light is an absolutely essential thing for human life. It is the source of health and vitality. During recent years science has discovered the saving power of light. Invalids who in former days were guarded in warm rooms, none too well lighted, are now sent to high altitudes, where the air is rarified and the rays of light are unhindered by smoke and dust. There, bathed in light, and surrounded by a pure atmosphere, the germs which menace their lungs die. Light and air are the best medicine, and the best prophylactic. Institutions for the blind, once nearly windowless, are to-day made bright and sunny. Thus even for unresponsive eyes light is a benefit.

What light is for the body, that God is for the mind and conscience of man. God is light, and He wills that His human children shall be sons and daughters of the light; that is, that they shall share all for which His Fatherhood stands—health, joy, and guidance. God is no mere appendage to life; He is our very life, without whom we cannot live as men. And His

light is the point of departure for all our progress. There is, and can be, no real *human* progress apart from the light that He sheds upon us. So the gospel comes to us as an evangel of light: light on God, light on man, light on life, and an inner light which brings its own assurance of truth. ‘God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.’ That is the Apostle’s summary of the effect of the gospel. It is not a philosophy to be debated, a problem to be solved. It is an illumination of the world which each man may, if he will, verify within himself as true for the personal life. Christ claims to be the Light of the World: light for the whole world, and for every part of the world’s life; for its politics, its finance, its commerce, its industry, its international relations.

There are many voices to-day crying out ‘Here is light,’ and claiming to be able to illuminate our darkness. But not one has light for the whole area of life, and not one penetrates to the causes of the darkness which envelops us. The world is looking for light, first in this and then in that quarter, and it receives nothing but fitful flashes, which expire as soon as they are kindled. It is not a settlement here and there that is needed, a few local adjustments. It is a world order that alone can give national and local order. The world is one, and it moves forwards or backwards as a unit. It is man himself who seeks his re-coronation, and who must emerge victorious from the chaos and darkness of the time. The new order must be that of the Apocalypse, the nations one in amity, understanding and co-operation, rejoicing in a Divine Light which drives out the devouring creatures of the night. And for this we are forced back upon God. We cannot create our own light. Nothing but the Divine *fiat* can help us. The new order must follow the way of the old creation. The first creative word must be, ‘Let there be light.’

2. What exactly do we mean when we speak of this light? God’s light for human life is no mystic thing which can be perceived only by psychic vision. It has taken express form. It has become Incarnate in Jesus Christ. His life, as St John says, is ‘the light of men.’ ‘In Holman Hunt’s picture, *The Light of the World*,

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, vii. 233.]

the appealing figure which stands before the closed door seeking admittance holds in His right hand a lantern, from which rays stream forth into the surrounding darkness. That is doubtless a necessary device for artistic purposes, but the real truth is that the light is not something that Christ holds in His hand. The light is Christ Himself.<sup>1</sup> Everything is reduced to this simple truth, that Christ is the Divine light in which mankind must walk if it is to be delivered from the chaos and darkness into which it is now plunged.

The soft light from a stable door  
Lies on the midnight lands,  
The wise men's star burns evermore  
Over all desert sands.

Unto all peoples of the earth  
A little child brought light,  
And never in the darkest place  
Can it be utter night.

No flickering torch, no wavering fire,  
But light—the life of men,  
Whatever clouds may veil the sky,  
Never is night again.

Christianity calls upon men to place the whole of human life under the light of Christ. The inner life, first of all: for our temper, and motive, and spirit need examining in the one light which can reveal their quality. If the secret motives which govern our life were examined in the presence of Christ, should we be proud of them? There is the heart of our maladies. We are what we are and the world is what it is because we refuse, and it refuses, the revealing light of the Son of God. Will anyone pretend that international relations, the modern methods of big business, finance, and industry could bear the scrutiny of the supreme Judge of men? These, deprived of the light of Christ, have combined to bring upon mankind a dread of life, the quenching of hope, suspicions and hatreds; have handicapped progress and driven us back to chaos. The radical cause of the world troubles is the refusal of man to walk in the light of Christ, and there can be no real cure until the nations learn to walk in that light. In the Apocalyptic vision the light of God enables the nations to see each other, to trust each other, to co-operate with each other. In the half-lights of former days

<sup>1</sup> Robert Menzies.

they could not distinguish each other's features. Now, in the light of God, disagreements due to misunderstandings have vanished. All barriers are down. The fierce and murderous competition of ancient times yields to a real co-operative movement, in which all peoples unite to bring their glory and honour, not into their own private storehouses, but into the common city of God. Here is humanity, at length freed from the incubus of a long-drawn-out tragedy, at liberty to develop its true life, unhampered by the hatreds and bitternesses of the past.

¶ It was President Wilson who said that we must cure diseased politics, commerce, industry and finance, as we cure tuberculosis, by making the sufferers live in the light and pure air of the day. And 'we cannot be crooked in the light.'

In the summer-time, before dawn, the valley of Zermatt is plunged in deep darkness. The pines add to the gloom. The pyramid of the Matterhorn is visible as a ghostly giant guarding the fastnesses of ice and snow. But the watcher who climbs to the Gornergrat soon witnesses a scene of unparalleled magnificence. The peaks of Monte Rosa are lightly touched with lovely colours which spread until the whole summit is bathed in glory. Then the sun rises and the colours merge into the pure white beam which contains them all. Swiftly the light travels down the mountain-side towards the valley, until at length the darkest recesses of the valley are lit up with the splendour of the day.

When we seek to visualize the future it is not a soulless, godless, materialistic world shadowed by fear of violence and destruction that we see. We see a world in which the light has triumphed and from which every shred of darkness shall have been expelled. That is one of the marks of the new earth which God is creating—'There shall be no night there'—the last remnant of darkness shall have been abolished. So let us be of good cheer.

Light of the world, illumine  
This darkened earth of Thine,  
Till everything that's human  
Be filled with the divine;  
Till every tongue and nation,  
From sin's dominion free,  
Rise in the new creation  
Which springs from love and Thee.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J. S. B. Monsell.



## Evening and Morning

Gen. i. 5.—‘And there was evening and there was morning, one day’ (R.V.).

THAT is not how we reckon now. Our day is made up of morning and evening. The Jews, however, have always begun their day with the evening, and in so doing they commemorate the creative order as it appears in the first chapter of Genesis. The creative order is symbolic. It is out of chaos into cosmos, out of darkness into light. That is always God’s method, and God’s method is the hope of the world. If we could bear that method in mind it would give us the clue to much that is mysterious and perplexing in our own life and in the life of society. The trouble is that so many, beginning their day with the morning, living in the light and the sunshine, think that the evening darkness is the close of the day, and, so thinking, the night reveals no stars. Morning is not the mother of night, but night is the mother of the morning. Those who recognize God’s method learn that in the darkest night the day is coming to the birth, and that, if they possess their souls in patience, they will see the morning star and the flush of dawn.

1. From its first page to its last the Bible insists that the evening always precedes the morning. Turn to the Psalms and you find a picture of David, as an old man, looking wistfully back across the years and sighing for his lost innocence. Power had come to him and eminence, but where were the simplicity and purity that were his when he kept his father’s sheep? And then he magnifies the grace that has so greatly forgiven everything. A new morning has been brought out of his soul’s dark night. ‘My youth,’ he cries, ‘is renewed like the eagle’s!’ He remembers how, in his early days on the grassy hillside, he watched the eagle as she built her nest, tore the down from her breast, and battered herself into ugliness in her fight for food for her young. And then the moulting season followed the breeding season. For awhile he saw her no more. And when she reappeared she was a thing of beauty and of glory, her fresh plumage glittering in the sunlight. ‘My youth is renewed like the eagle’s!’ he cries in a fine ecstasy. Morning had evolved from night; a fair

beginning had come out of a dismal and tragic ending. And David wrote this fine song of his restored innocence.

What is the story of Nicodemus but the story of a soul being led from the darkness to light? The trouble with Nicodemus was his false assumption that the beginning comes before the end, and that beyond that end there can be no beginning. ‘How can a man be born again when he is old?’ he pathetically inquires. And, with an exquisitely tender touch, Jesus showed how the morning always blossoms out of the evening, the new days out of the old night; and the aged ruler never forgot.

¶ Samuel Hadley tells us that, down in Water Street, in New York, this was the one rule that was regarded as fundamental. However frequently a man relapsed into his old vices he was always told that his collapse was not an ending but a beginning; it was the dark night out of which the new day-dawn could arise.<sup>1</sup>

2. Look, again, at this truth in the light of the story of the Old Testament. What was the history of the old covenant but a history of growing hope? There was night; but God was ever setting men’s faces towards the dawn, and telling them of the coming day. To all true, earnest hearts, wrapped about still in the shades of night, the cry rang out triumphantly, ‘The morning cometh!’ Almost the last word of Old Testament prophecy to those who were still peering through the darkness of the long-drawn night was a prophecy of sun-rise. Then, in the fullness of time, the sun rose, bringing in the glad day. ‘The people that sat in darkness saw a great light, and to them that sat in the region and shadow of death, to them did light spring up.’

¶ There is a marvellous passage at the opening of the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus. A solitary watchman crouches on the palace-roof at midnight. Every night, for weary months, he has been stationed there—

Conning the nightly concourse of the stars  
That shine majestic in yon clear heaven,

and waiting for the gleam of the bonfire that shall announce the fall of Troy and the ending of the Trojan war. Suddenly, clear through

<sup>1</sup> F. W. Boreham, *The Golden Milestone*, 30.

the darkness, the flame of the beacon leaps up the sky; and the watchman on the battlements, his long vigil over and the tension snapped, springs to his feet and cries aloud—

All hail! thou light in darkness, harbinger of day!<sup>1</sup>

3. We may find a further illustration of this great truth in the Crucifixion of Jesus. The disaster of Good Friday plunged the disciples into a condition of hopeless chaos and despair. They felt like men who had staked everything on some enterprise which had collapsed. All their cherished ambitions lay buried in that garden grave, as dead as He was whom they had trusted and loved. A black night of gloom and disappointment had settled down upon their life; and their mental condition was summed up in that pathetic lament of the two sorrowing disciples on the Emmaus road—‘We trusted,’ they said, but our confidence was misplaced, and such trust is no longer possible, ‘we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.’

¶ In *The Passing of Arthur*, Tennyson pictures the good Sir Bedivere standing on the shore, watching the barge that carried his dying King away from him for ever:

Long stood Sir Bedivere  
Revolving many memories, till the hull  
Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,  
And on the mere the wailing died away.

But when that moan had past for evermore,  
The stillness of the dead world's winter dawn  
Amazed him, and he groan'd, ‘The King is gone.’

But all these dark shadows were dissipated on Easter Day. It was the dawn of a greater and a brighter day than had ever yet burst over creation—a new era in the evolution of the ages, and in the history of mankind—when ‘the sun of righteousness’ arose victoriously from the grave, when death's Conqueror, leading captivity captive, ‘brought life and immortality to light through the gospel’; when man's destiny became irradiated once and for ever with the conviction of a triumphant certainty; when the true ‘dayspring from on

high’ dispersed the shades which hung so heavily over a sinful world; and when the *fiat* of God Almighty sounded forth once more in trumpet tones, as at the Creation, ‘Let there be light: and there was light. . . . And there was evening and there was morning, one day.’

4. When our Lord Jesus left His disciples He said, ‘I am with you always.’ The evening was at hand, but there was to be the dawn of a new morning in which He would never forsake them. Ah! we feel, it is all so puzzling, a world of broken lights, dimness that we cannot pierce, a way that is overhung with clouds. Yes, that is the evening. But the morning is before us. In the beginning God created; and though, when the day has come, we are surrounded by temptations and the bitter consequences of sin, there is given, to strengthen and to arouse us, the vision of the New Heaven and the New Earth that He is still creating, where He will give to him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely, where the evening will have passed into that glorious morning when there shall be no more sin, and when he that overcometh shall inherit all things.

## Man's Place in the Universe

Gen. i. 26.—‘And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.’

1. God's work in the creative process reaches its climax in the Making of Man. In describing this event the writer fastens with unerring instinct not only on the one distinguishing feature of our humanity—that we are essentially spiritual in nature—but on man's function in the world order. He is here, he tells us, not as one among many living organisms, nor merely as the first among many, but as filling a unique and solitary place among them. He is here for sovereignty, for dominion over the material earth, and over the world of life of which physically, and in a sense mentally, he forms a part. And this is so because, while of the earth earthy, he is also of heavenly origin and nature. He is made, that is, in the

<sup>1</sup> J. S. Stewart, *The Strong Name*, 244.



image of God; he has had delegated to him for his use and function on earth some at least of the Divine attributes; and in virtue of these, he is told that he is to exercise dominion over the earth, by subduing it, and by ruling over all the kingdoms of life beneath him. That is his place and function in Nature.

But that sovereignty, while his by right and function, is not his as yet actually. He has to win this sovereignty by the exercise of his God-given faculties. And it is clearly implied that the function is to be exercised, not apart from God, but in fellowship and fear of God. The process of conquering the world is to be fulfilled in a religious spirit, as God's child, as His co-worker. He is God's 'junior partner,' as it were, in the lordship of Creation and in the order of Providence.

2. Put into modern phrase, man is here to conquer and control his environment. His whole history is but the story of that conquest, so far as it has yet been achieved. For the end is not yet.

Living organic creatures may stand in one of three relations to their environment. In the first place they may be its slaves, living as it were on sufferance, the mere sport of the elements, unable to win more than a bare and precarious subsistence in an indifferent or hostile world. A little change for the worse in their surroundings, and the fate of such creatures is extinction. Secondly, they may be in stable friendly relations with the surrounding conditions of their life. In such a case they go on reproducing their kind without much variation for many centuries and millenniums. Or, thirdly, gifted with superabundant vitality, they may rise above the narrower ranges of their environment into correspondence with ranges still wider and ampler, and develop into new species of a higher kind. The lower environment has been mastered, and life goes on to fresh conquests, into greater richness and efficiency of operation and correspondence.

It is under such conditions that life has gradually climbed from the simplicity and poverty of correspondence with their environment of the earliest organisms till at last man has emerged, supreme among mammals, and solitary in the possession of faculties uniquely his own.

What was the equipment which has enabled

him to rise into this supreme position? Physically, he is by no means the most richly equipped among organic beings. Both for offence and for defence he is no match for a score of other creatures. Two organs, however, he has—the inventive brain and the supple hand—which no other earthly creature possesses; and, in virtue of these as the organs of mind, he has been able not only to subdue the inanimate world but to rule over the animal creation with undisputed sway. The invention of tools has enabled him to utilize the forces and laws of matter for his own benefit; and by the invention of weapons he has been able to meet the assaults of the wilder creatures and to reign supreme over them.

Two other faculties or aptitudes have brought man into relation with a still higher environment. His gregarious habits have developed his social affinities, and made an ethical creature of him; and his sensitiveness to spiritual realities has brought him into more or less conscious relations with God; in other words, he is a moral and a religious being.

3. If we ask what were the impelling or stimulating agencies which have quickened man to the exercise of his distinctive powers over his environment, we shall be bound to say that the chief was the sense of necessity to fight for his existence in a world at first by no means favourable to his survival. Whether he began as a troglodyte or cave-dweller, or as an arboreal creature, or as both in turn, he was sore put to it for many generations to survive at all. But survive he did, and in the bitter struggle he developed those 'wrestling thews' of body and mind 'that threw the world,' and at last established him in sure possession of his inheritance over nearly the whole surface of the earth.

The story of man's conquest of the earth is an infinitely long one, with many retrogressions and local failures, with many tragic lapses, with many insecure victories. Now as hunter and nomad, now as village husbandman and cultivator of the soil, now as city-dweller and craftsman, his rise into a settled civilized order has been painfully slow and uncertain. But, largely through the invention of writing, by which the gains of one generation or race have been secured as stages from which to progress to better stages, and through conquest of the

means of travel, by which the achievements of contemporary forms of civilizations have become the possession of others, the process has been going on, and it is going on still, till we are within sight of a world-civilization at last.

It is an outstanding fact that this consummation has been brought about with astonishing acceleration during the last few centuries. This is the fruit of what is called modern science, which has given us the internal-combustion engine, the telephone, wireless, the aeroplane, and countless other inventions. And, with all these conquests, we are made to feel that we are still not at the end, but rather at the beginning of our journey of conquest. The horizon of knowledge is ever widening and lifting; the spaces above and around are yielding fresh secrets day by day; the world of the infinitely little as well as of the infinitely great is unlocking its treasures to our ardent gaze, and possibly to ages not distant in the future we of to-day will seem only a little advanced on primitive man in comparison with the spacious and ordered universe open to their conquering vision.

The lightning is his slave; heaven's utmost deep

Gives up her stars, and like a flock of sheep  
They pass before his eye, are number'd, and  
roll on!

The tempest is his steed, he strides the air;  
And the abyss shouts from her depth laid bare,

Heaven, hast thou secrets? Man unveils me;  
I have none.<sup>1</sup>

4. And yet, are we satisfied altogether with our achievements, with the use we have made of them, and with the prospect before us? The advance of humanity during the past few centuries has been rapid and continuous beyond parallel in all that makes for the conquest of Nature. Before the last war we were thinking how beneficent all this process was becoming, and what a great Kingdom of Man we were preparing for coming ages. But now, in the midst of the present world-tragedy, who is so bold an optimist as to cherish that hope so confidently to-day? Are we not forced rather to confess that the intellectual advance of civilized humanity has developed, not too slowly, but too rapidly and too suddenly in

<sup>1</sup> Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*.

proportion to its ethical and spiritual progress? Is man, even to-day, a creature fit to use such power as he has achieved over the world in which he lives? Has he not been too intent on mastering Nature, and too little on mastering himself? Power, unregulated by a sense of earnest and humble responsibility, may be a peril in proportion to its very greatness.

¶ Science, declares C. E. Joad, has 'won for us powers fit for the gods, yet we bring to their use the mentality of schoolboys or savages.' And Winifred Holtby: 'We are so busy with our patient erections of scientific invention. And we don't seem able to pull our spiritual standard up to the level of our material civilization.'

Science—which is ordered knowledge and conquest of our environment—is good, but it is not the only, or the highest, good. That highest good is an ordered knowledge and conquest of ourselves; and this can be got only by an ordered knowledge of God in His relation to us, and by obedience to what that knowledge involves. Not till man solemnly faces the facts of his inner life, and of the Divine life above him, and brings these two into right relations, will he be fit to exercise that sovereignty over Nature which it is his function to achieve. That sovereignty is intended to be exercised in obedience to a higher sovereignty. Man is God's image, that is, His child; and any civilization which is built on any foundation independent of his sonship will be but another Tower of Babel, which will be perilous in proportion to its height, and will lead to nothing but confusion and ruin in the end.

## Increasing the Values of the World

Gen. i. 28.—'Be fruitful.'

THE first chapter of the Book of Genesis is full of the sense of God's joy in His work of creation. Once and again we are told that God saw that it was good. And His will that the world should be a world of rich productiveness is vividly declared. 'Be fruitful' is the word which expresses God's purpose for the world. We seem far enough from the idyllic picture suggested by these ancient words. But it is still true that the fundamental matter in our exist-



ence is the matter of productiveness. To advance in every way the fruitfulness of the world is a high and most worthy calling. The producer is the fundamental benefactor of the world.

1. There is the matter of *material production*. The man who co-operates with Nature and as a tiller of the soil or a herdsman is a worker for the fruitfulness of the world is still our fundamental man. He provides us with food to eat and with clothes to wear. All civilization rests at last on agriculture.

The man who brings forth the treasures of the mines and bends the forces of Nature to his purpose is a producer to whose work we all pay toll. Every time a new and effective machine is invented the world is a more potential place in which to live. And the machine is to make possible a republic where every man can be a ruler. The world of material things has come to be a bewildering world. And in the midst of it all man moves the master of the forces which he has released. The worker who understands the significance of it all has a great pride in this amazing fruitfulness of the human mind. He has his great dream of a world where, in the noblest way, every man is a producer and where the values of the world are increased by the labour of every human being.

¶ On Christmas Day, 1821, Michael Faraday, who had been working on a previous experiment by Oersted made in 1819, called his wife into his laboratory to see, for the first time, a magnet going round an electric current. That was the first of all the electric motors. It would be hard to say how many millions, nay thousands of millions, the electric motor has added to the wealth of the world.<sup>1</sup>

The fundamental duty of being a producer, of having a share in the fruitfulness of the world, cannot be stated with too much emphasis. John Ruskin put it powerfully once when he said, 'No man has a right to eat a meal which he has not earned.' The problem of a true man is the question of finding the fashion in which he can be the most effective producer of the most important values.

The material world does not exhaust the values of life. Food and clothing answer to deep and structural necessities. But they are not an end in themselves, and the body which

they feed is not an end in itself. They exist, and it exists, for the sake of making possible a more lofty life.

2. Mankind is also responsible for *mental production*. The normal world is not a world where the vast multitudes are productive in the material realm, and only a few are productive in the world of the mind. Mental fruitfulness is to be the portion of every man and every woman and every child. And, where it is not, one can only say that society has failed to function in complete and adequate fashion.

There is one mind which every man can bring to fuller power and larger value all the time. And that mind is his own. It is also true that while he is doing this he will be affecting other minds and making it easier for them to reach their full capacity. There is always danger that a bright young man may suppose that adroitness is real mental power. It is the mind which is a sure and dependable instrument for the finding of the truth, for coming into understanding contact with reality, that is the mind actually attaining the highest value to its possessor and to the world.

Here it is important to realize the difference between manipulation and production. When a man invents an instrument which humanity needs, and as a result secures large returns, he is receiving the reward of actual productiveness. When a man applies his mind to making the largest use of existing instruments of value he is in effect adding to their number. But, when a man by deft manipulation secures such control of the market or such a relation to certain stocks that he secures a return without rendering a corresponding service, he is not a producer. In a very ignoble sense he is a manipulator. The world really has a harder lot because he is living in it. The man who is choosing his life-work must face the full significance of the fundamental distinction. Does the work of which he is thinking involve a real and necessary service to the world, or is it merely a matter of becoming a participant in the battle of wits as to who shall be able to get control of the largest amount of the spoil?

To be sure, the realm of production is a large one. On the mental side it includes the securing and the interpreting and executive activities of a system of wise laws. It includes all neces-

<sup>1</sup> *Science and the Nation*, 41.

sary tasks of organization and administration. But it does not include any activity which is a method of obtaining values without rendering a corresponding service. The man who is a mere manipulator is one of the most sinister figures, and in a fashion one of the most pitiable figures, in a world where God intended every man to be a producer.

3. There is a great enterprise in relation to *moral fruitfulness* in the world. A wise man once declared that the purpose of humanity was to propagate life and character. And when you come to think of it the first has no permanently good meaning without the second. The man who can teach morals, the man who can reinforce moral considerations, the man who can have a share in the production of character, is engaged in a business which is fundamental to the health of the world, and at last is fundamental to the very existence of a developing civilization.

The fruitfulness of humanity finds a particularly happy expression in the social spirit. And this social spirit, although it has to do with many men and women and many little children, must find lodgment in particular minds and hearts. There is no brotherly feeling which floats about in the world at large, sweetening life without having any contact with particular lives. The new society is produced as individual men are saved from the selfish mind and become possessed of the social mind. When a man commits the Golden Rule to his life, and not merely to his memory, he is producing, as far as his own character is concerned, the social spirit. Most people are very happy to apply the social spirit to their own circle. But there are masses of people all about them who simply never come within that circle. When Thomas Mott Osborne said he wanted every criminal to come to the place where he would think of all other men as his pals, he was setting forth an ideal which would have transforming effect outside our penal institutions. The social mind considers all other minds significant. It finds all other lives interesting. It is ready to offer to each a real quality of comradeship. And it thinks of human nature as the most wonderful land in its perpetual possibilities as regards the discovery of new and glorious and unsuspected treasures. There is no bloom and no fruit of the individual life more potent for good among

men than the growth of the social spirit. Every human value in the world is multiplied as the social spirit grows.

¶ Arthur St John Adcock, editor for over twenty years of *The Bookman*, was the generous friend of all who were in need. Arthur Mee, who described him as 'the finest type of Englishman who ever held a pen,' said: 'He believed in everybody a little; nobody was too hopeless. Long ago there was a ne'er-do-well who flitted in and out of offices, and on and off papers, disappearing and appearing again until most people were sick of him; but not our Knight-Errant. To the last of these disappearances he believed, and in the end the news came that the *Stella* had gone down and a woman had cried for a place in the boat. A man got out and made room; it was the Disappearing Ne'er-do-well.'

4. The highest of all the values of the world are the *spiritual values*. And our fruitfulness is by no means complete until it includes the realm of the spirit. Most of us have known people who somehow gave us a sense of spiritual altitude. It is not that they were posing. It is not that they were conscious of spiritual height. The charm and the wonder was just their entire unconsciousness. They were all the while assuming that other people looked at the world from their own lofty position. And in an astonishing number of cases people rose to the demand. It is tremendously hard to disappoint sincere spiritual expectation. We all know, when we stop to think of it, that the people of spiritual height are the great people in any enterprise. They have a place all their own. They do a work all their own. They are a part of the best capital of the world. The command to be fruitful comes to a climax of meaning in this field of spiritual values.

¶ After the death of Dick Sheppard, Dr L. P. Jacks wrote: 'Dick Sheppard was a living proof of the existence of God. . . . I met him only once, and my thought as I left him was something like this: "Were all other proofs to fail me, that man alone would compel me to believe that God exists and that God is love." In none whom I have known in these days has the light of the spirit shone with a brighter or steadier flame.'

In all these ways each generation is to increase the values to be found on this planet. It is



to be richer in material values because we have lived. It is to be richer in character because we have walked the ways of the earth. It is to be richer in mental power and in attained knowledge because we have used our minds. It is to be richer in social interest and consecration because we have moved among men. It is to be a world richer in all those attributes of the spirit which come from an awareness of God, and all the realities which lift this mortal into the realm of immortality.

It is with almost a shock of recognition that we realize how deeply productive was the life of Jesus in all these fashions. He released forces which increased every sort of real value there is in the world. In this deep sense His was the most productive life of history. The triumph of His Kingdom means the conservation of every noble value in the life of this world and the attainment of every completion of value in the world to come.

## The Origin of Man

Gen. ii. 7.—‘And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.’

WHAT is man? Whence does he come? Here in the text is one answer, a very old answer; and not only an answer that has never been superseded, but the only answer. The only alternatives are question-marks.

Let us look at the text from two different, though related, points of view. First, at the fact here affirmed; and, secondly, at some of its implications.

1. *The Fact*.—The text commits itself to a tremendous affirmation about man—that God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul—but it commits itself to no hint as to the process. How did man become man? Science cannot tell us. And, mark this: science can only deny God by denying man—the real man. It can only solve the problem of soul apart from God by denying soul. It can only set aside the implications of this text by setting aside the deepest intuitions of man about himself, and not only his intuitions, but his definite self-knowledge. The materialistic science of the

last quarter of the nineteenth century could only invalidate this text, and eliminate God, by affirming that man is nothing but a superior animal. And man—every man—knows that that is not true; knows that the ‘science’ that so defines man is not true. And science is coming to see that for itself, more and more; to realise that those aspects of the earlier Darwinism which tended to represent man as a mere machine are totally inadequate to explain him. As a distinguished thinker has said, ‘a self-stoking, self-adjusting, self-directing, self-reproducing machine is nothing like a machine at all.’

Two facts stand out to-day as incontrovertible—to most educated people as unarguable—first, that man has had an animal ancestry, that physically he has come up through all the ascending grades of animal development and still possesses vestiges of many of them; and most of us know that in its pre-natal period the unborn child passes through and reduplicates the whole prodigious story of human development in its passage from the single cell to the completely-developed human.

¶ The gap theory, by which the gulf between primitive man and the highest of the apes was looked upon as unbridgeable, is held now by few. Though, indeed, we may sympathize with Bishop Gore, who, standing before the chimpanzee in the Zoo, was once heard murmuring, ‘Percy, Percy, I cannot really believe that you are one of my ancestors,’ we can no longer deny that in the distant past we had many relations whom now we should like to repudiate.<sup>1</sup>

The second fact is this: man, as he is, is essentially unlike, and fundamentally different from, the highest animal or any animal. That is where science is utterly baffled. It cannot begin to explain the difference. From talking blatantly forty years ago about mechanical man, the best science to-day, awed and more reverent and less self-confident, finds itself in the presence of the mystery man. It knows, and is admitting, that Natural Selection and the other Darwinian factors, while true, are not sufficient to explain Variation, still less to explain Mutation, and least of all to explain Man. We could hardly count Sir Arthur Keith among the prophets, and yet in one of his books, quoting Huxley, he says: ‘But to be a believer in teleology and yet accept Evolution

<sup>1</sup> The Bishop of Winchester, *What is Man?*, 17.

it is only necessary to say that *the original plan was sketched out*, that the purpose was foreshadowed, in the molecular arrangements out of which the animals have come.' And adds: 'Thus it will be seen that Huxley . . . had come to the startling conclusion that the shaping or controlling forces . . . lay latent in the germ-plasm of that simian stock which ultimately blossomed into human form.' 'Original plan'; 'shaping and controlling forces'! What is this? If that is not theology, it is its first cousin! To the leading exponents of science man is no longer the product of a blind mechanism. Man is not only evolved, but is the product of an '*original plan*.' There is not really so much difference between the two concepts of Evolution and Special Creation. For Evolution the miracle was at the beginning, and all along the course, instead of in a special intervention at a particular juncture. You can't explain man 'in the image of God' and leave God out. It is only a question of *where God comes in*—God at the beginning, or God at the end? And we prefer to believe with science in God at the beginning, and in man as implicit in the process *as man* from the beginning. All creation is 'special creation.'

For this is not merely the story of man, but of every man. Every man begins as a single cell that no one would dream of calling spiritual and no one (unless he knew) would ever dream could possibly become the spiritual. And yet it grows and grows—no one knows how; it is born, just a little bundle of physical reflexes; and at three months old is less intelligent than a dog three months old. Who can find the spiritual in an infant a month old, and if it died at a week old? But it grows and grows and something happens, something comes—who can say, what or how or when or whence? And that unintelligent, unself-conscious, physical mass of reflexes becomes *man*—a living soul. The whole mystery of man—the origin of man—is *in every man*. But you say, 'the potentiality is there.' Of course. And in the one case as in the other; in the case of creation as in the case of birth. A miracle somewhere: is it less wonderful at the beginning than at the end, or in the middle? It is not a bit more wonderful, or mysterious, or baffling that mankind, self-conscious, eternity-conscious, Godlike, should have come after millions of years from the primeval ooze than that every man comes

similarly from a single primordial cell in a few years. At what point—and how and by what means—did that little unconscious thing become a *soul*? It was there from the beginning? Quite so. But if you had never seen a man, would you know that? How do you know? Because you have seen the *end*. Just the same argument applies in the other case. *It was there from the beginning*. And we know that, because the only safe and sound method is to estimate the beginning in terms of the end; to judge man by what *he is* and where he is going, and not by what he came from. 'By their fruits shall ye know them'—*not* by their roots.

¶ A violin in the hands of a great performer playing the *Fifth Symphony* is a marvellous instrument. If, now, for the first time one learned that violins are composed of wood and catgut, would he say that the violin is something other than it was before? Obviously there are two approaches to understanding the violin. From the standpoint of origins, it is made of lowly materials; from the standpoint of value, it is an instrument made for high purposes on which the master compositions of the ages can be played.<sup>1</sup>

God breathed into him the breath of life and man became a living soul. It was there from the beginning. How, or by what means, it has been maintained, or kept true and undefeated in its immortal purpose over countless myriads of years, no one knows. But, surely, what science has taught us of the long, amazing process by which from the ooze of the sea man has become a living soul, with the breath of God in his nostrils, far from shaking our faith, ought rather to deepen it into an adoring wonder before the infinite patience and the newly illumined majesty of the purpose of God in the world.

Am I an atom in a soulless scheme,  
My body real, but my soul a dream?  
It may be so. But how explain the birth  
Of dreams of soul, upon a soulless earth?

You simply cannot. The earth is not soulless. The whole process is saturated with soul. And there would be no soul at the end, if there had not been Soul at the beginning.

¶ It is altogether wrong to imagine that the influence of the directing Mind behind the

<sup>1</sup> H. E. Fosdick, *Adventurous Religion*, 132.



Universe is ruled out by the evolutionary theory. To discover the plan on which a great cathedral has been constructed is not to dispense with the architect and the builder. The Mind responsible for those chemical affinities and molecular combinations which resulted in the appearance of the first living protoplasmic cell was also responsible for endowing the protoplasm with the power of adapting itself to its environment. So far as we can judge of any of His operations in Nature, the Creator invariably makes use of what we call secondary causes. He is throughout self-consistent, and Darwin's demonstration of man's evolutionary ascension should not shake the belief of anyone in the overruling and controlling influence of the Mind which fore-ordained and foreknew that out of the speck of protoplasm in the lagoon at the foot of the hill creature after creature should evolve, and, moulded by environment, struggle on, until at last man should stand erect upon the summit.<sup>1</sup>

2. *The Implications.*—The first implication is *Immortality*. If the teaching of the text—unaffected in its essentials by any known fact of science—is true, then man is immortal by his nature, his origin. Those who hold the doctrine of Conditional Immortality maintain that the Bible never declares man to be naturally immortal. Rather it is definitely and decisively implied on the first page of the Bible, for what lives by the breath of God cannot die; and it is reaffirmed in the Incarnation of Christ on the last page. Whatever his fate, whatever the future, if man is a child of God, man is immortal. If these things be so, what manner of persons ought we to be?

Secondly, there is the light it casts upon the question of *the Divinity of Christ*. What is the root-problem? How can God and man become one? And the answer is that by a true understanding of the nature and origin of man, they are one. There cannot be two kinds of divinity, just as there cannot be two kinds of sunlight, though there may be more or less of it. Sunlight is just sunlight, whether it is there or here—whether it be the awful, consuming fierceness of the sun's blazing mass, at which a man cannot look without losing sight and reason, or the gentle, filtered sun-ray: so divinity is divinity whether it be in man or

in God. By virtue of his origin, and of his nature—unique in all creation—as a sentient, reasoning, idealizing, eternity-breathing being, a spirit harboured in flesh—there is the divine spark in man, the vital spark. And, however slight and tenuous the ray may be, it must be of the same *essence* as the full radiance and splendour of the sun. The old traditional theology represented man and God as being utterly different, disparate, and separate. The New Testament bases on the similarity, the affinity, the essential relationship of man and God. Christ came to reveal the ideal Sonship—not to make us sons of God, but to show us how to live as sons of God; to reveal what God really is, and what it really means to be sons of God; not to make us immortal, but to '*bring life and immortality to light* in the gospel.' And here the New Testament links with the earliest of the Old Testament, with the essential teaching of Genesis about man. Every man has some of God in him (otherwise how could it be true that 'now are we the sons of God'?), but Christ had the *All* of God in Him, as far as this was possible to the limitations of humanity.

It is just because our text is true at the beginning that Christ is so convincing at the end. It is because God breathed into our nostrils the breath of life—His life—and *His life is one*—that Christ is no stranger here, no doubtful prodigy, but inevitable; and that we touch God so surely, many of us alone surely, in Him in whom, as St Paul in a flash of inspired insight declares, 'dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily': in other words—the fullest possible manifestation of God that humanity can know.

## God in Gardens

Gen. ii. 8.—'And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.'

MAN has an incurable love for a garden. Whether it is a merchant prince who retires from the busy world of commerce and purchases some lordly park, or the city clerk who steals the hours from sleep to grub about in the grimy back yard which he dignifies by giving it the name of a garden, or the dweller in an east-end

<sup>1</sup> R. W. Mackenna, *The Adventure of Life*, 46.

tenement whose window-boxes flame gaily on the ugly barrack walls in June, or the modern experiment in so-called garden cities—all these things witness to the ineradicable love of gardens in the human heart.

It is a garden that lingers most vividly in our memories of childhood; a garden with trees and flowers and boundless space for glorious games; a place where it was always summer-time. Have you ever made a pilgrimage to that garden which you remember as so fine and fair? And was it not a shock to discover how incredibly small and poor it really was? No, it cannot be that which left such a pleasant picture in the mind.

Surely it must be some racial memory that lies at the back of these desires and dreams. When we read Genesis, surely we remember it all. A garden planted under the rays of the rising sun, where glorious trees spread shadowed branches jewelled with ripening fruits. And most certainly we remember that strange peace which lay on the garden in the cool of the evening, as if some glorious and solemn presence moved along the grass, under the trees, and by the still waters. For we feel every evening something of that still.

¶ When Shakespeare says of the dying Falstaff, 'a babbled o' green fields,' is it not just genius's expression of that cleansing memory of gardens where once God walked and His voice was heard?

1. The Bible story begins in a garden and ends in a garden-city. 'God planted a garden eastward in Eden. . . . And on this side of the river and on that was the tree of life.' It was in a garden in the cool of the day that God walked and talked with His children, and in all the world there is no place so inspiring, so full of beauty as a garden where life and loveliness whisper their messages of joy and peace.

¶ When old Diocletian was invited from his retreat to resume the royal purple which he had laid down some years before, he exclaimed: 'Could you but see those fruits and herbs of mine own raising at Salona, you would never talk to me of empire!'

The main interest of the Hebrew writer, however, is in the moral and spiritual condition of man; and that which constituted the delight of Eden was that sin had not yet entered the world. The attractive feature of the Eden life

was the eternal charm of innocence. Dorothy Frances Gurney has put the story into lovely verse:

The Lord God planted a garden  
In the first white days of the world,  
And He set there an angel warden  
In a garment of light enfurled.

So near to the peace of Heaven,  
That the hawk might nest with the wren,  
For there in the cool of the even  
God walked with the first of men.

And I dream that these garden closes  
With their shade and their sun-flecked sod  
And their lilies and bowers of roses,  
Were laid by the hand of God.

The kiss of the sun for pardon,  
The song of the birds for mirth,  
One is nearer God's heart in a garden  
Than anywhere else on earth.

But this tells only part of the garden-story. The verses are true, but not wholly true; for instead of being nearer God's heart in a garden than anywhere else on earth, before the story ends Adam and Eve found that they were nearer the heart of a devil. Instead of walking with God in the cool of the day they held fellowship in the garden with hypocrisy and deceit, with lies and shame, and Eden became the background of life's greatest tragedy. It is often so. Cardinal Wolsey walked in the king's garden and held fellowship with royalty and rank, with the glories of position and power; but he found that he was nearer the heart of treachery than he was to the heart of God, and before his death confessed that had he served his God with half the zeal with which he had served his king he would not, in his old age, have been left naked to his enemies. Nero lived and walked in the royal gardens of Rome, but against the beauty and loveliness of the Eternal City he made bonfires of the bodies of the Christians who refused him the allegiance of their hearts, and the gardens of Rome became scenes of persecution, the record of which still stains the pages of history.<sup>1</sup>

Gardens are sweet and lovely spots, and God who made and loves them often meets His glad

<sup>1</sup> H. T. Kerr, *The Gospel in Modern Poetry*, 170.



human creatures there. But the Man who got nearest the heart of God in a garden sweated great drops of blood. Aye, and they buried Him in another garden, and then He was nearer God's heart than anywhere else on earth, and nearer than any other has ever got.

2. It is a far cry from the Garden of Eden to the Garden of Gethsemane, but they have very intimate relations. The tragedy enacted in the one is the reason for the tragedy of the other, and when we go out into the garden on the Mount of Olives with Jesus and His disciples after they have taken the last supper together, and we see Christ kneeling there alone in the garden, apart from the disciples, and hear His agonizing cry, 'If it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done!' we see the beginning of a tragedy which is to end on the cross of Calvary. And the agony of atonement for sin which we see in the Garden of Gethsemane has to do with the tragedy of sin of which we learn in this Garden of Eden.

3. The third garden is close at hand. The Apostle John tells us that 'in the place where he was crucified there was a garden.' Not such a garden as we cherish round our homes—not formal and narrow and neat, but an orchard of vines and olives, heavy with foliage and thick with a wealth of flowers. For Passover falls when the year is young, and Joseph's garden at Easter would be rich with the blossoming beauty of spring. Christ died when the winter was past and the rain was over and gone, when the flowers appeared in the earth and the time of the singing of the birds was come. It was amid the flush and glory of Nature's resurrection that the Lord of Nature laid down His life. Surely we may believe without irreverence that even to Him it was some comfort that He died in a garden. In that hour of desertion and dereliction did the flowers bring back to Jesus the same message which He bade His disciples learn from their petals? Did their fragrance reach Him, whom all men had forsaken? Did their breath whisper faith and courage and victory in His dying Passion?

As was man's fall, so also was man's redemption. In the beginning it is written how the first Adam sinned in Paradise, the thornless garden of God, and the curse of evil came upon

all his race, so that the earth brings forth thorns and thistles for their labour, and in the sweat of their brow they must eat their bread. But now, in the end of the ages, the Lord of all becomes the Brother of all, that He may Himself bear the curse of all. The thorns were bound about His forehead, and the sweat of His travail was as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground. He suffered and died in a garden; and His Cross is made the Tree of Life in the midst of it, and the leaves of this Tree are for the healing of the nations.<sup>1</sup>

There were two gardens in the land,  
And both lay on a hill,  
And one was called Gethsemane,  
The other was near Calvary;  
And both are with us still.

Lord, when we climb our Olivet,  
Show us the garden there.  
And teach us how to kneel with Thee  
Beneath some ancient olive tree,  
And learn to pray Thy prayer.

And when we climb the farther hill,  
Where once the mighty Powers  
Of hell defied Thee, lift our eyes  
To where the peaceful garden lies,  
That welcomed Thee with flowers.<sup>2</sup>

## Eve

Gen. ii. 18.—'And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.'

Gen. iii. 6.—'And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.'

Gen. iii. 20.—'And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.'

1. WHENEVER, or however, Genesis ii. was composed, it bears the hand-print of God in the conception of woman being the companion, the help meet for man; 'answering to him,' as the margin puts it. Our Lord set His seal to this Divine message when He took the primitive story of Eden to correct even the legislation of Moses; and He placed the

<sup>1</sup> T. H. Darlow, *Holy Ground*, 60.

<sup>2</sup> Amy Carmichael, *Kohila*, 141.

inspiration of the passage beyond all question for the Christian when He incorporated its lesson in His own New Law: 'Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh.' In the thought of God, man is incomplete alone: 'Male and female created he them.' In the vision of Christ, that unity of male and female would pass into a spiritual form among the angels of God in Heaven; for in Him there is no male or female; but, according to His own word, man and wife are inseparable, the complements of one another, forming only in their union the ideal human being. Out of this truth—surely a truth of revelation, a truth established by the Spirit of God instructing and directing the human race—grows the sanctity of marriage, and that ideal mystical relation of man and wife on which all high civilization and permanent progress depend. It is a lesson well written in the forefront of all religious teaching.

¶ When the man looks upon the woman for the first time, as she is presented to him by God, his surprise and gladness break into verse. The first poem in the Bible is occasioned by that event which inspires most of our great poets to essay their first songs; it is a love-poem. 'This is now bone of my bones,' Adam said, according to the Authorized Version, 'and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' That is a bald translation of what he said. But perhaps we may bring out the poetry of the verse by a slight expansion. And Adam said:

She, she is bone of my bone,  
And flesh of my flesh is she;  
Woman her name, which is grown  
Out of man, out of me.

The second lesson carries the conception of woman a little farther still. She is ordained man's companion, but she becomes by her intrinsic qualities his leader. For good or evil she will give the tone to human life. That the first bent she gave to it was evil has been sufficiently celebrated. Milton especially has made unchivalrous use of it; and his inability to do justice to Eve is a blot upon the greatest epic in the English tongue. But the decisive lesson of the story is not that woman leads man into sin, but that, for good or evil, she leads him.

¶ You cannot think that the buckling on of the knight's armour by his lady's hand was a mere caprice of romantic fashion. It is the type of an eternal truth—that the soul's armour is never well set to the heart unless a woman's hand has braced it; and it is only when she braces it loosely that the honour of manhood fails.<sup>1</sup>

Then the story proceeds to tell of motherhood, and succeeds in presenting all its sorrows and sanctities in a few passing words and names—a work of genius indeed, if we do not at once recognize, as surely we must, that the whole picture is a product of the Divine Spirit, poem, myth, or allegory, as you please, but a tale told by God Himself through human lips for the lasting instruction of man.

2. As a woman of independent will and individual responsibility, Eve comes before us first in the third chapter of Genesis, and that chapter is the story of the Fall. There Eve is representative of the temptation that every human being has to meet. The temptation was threefold, being addressed to the body, the soul, and the spirit. 'When the woman saw (1) that the tree was good for food, and (2) that it was a delight to the eyes, and (3) that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat.' So is it always. And so was it with Jesus. When we compare the temptations to which He had to submit, as recorded by St Luke, we see at once that He had to submit to exactly the same temptations as Eve.

(1) Eve 'saw that the tree was good for food'—it was a temptation addressed to the bodily appetites. So 'when Jesus was afterward an hungered,' the devil came to Him and said, 'If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.'

(2) Again, Eve saw that the tree 'was a delight to the eyes'—it was a temptation to the mind, to the sense of beauty, to the unlawful indulgence of those higher gifts of ear and eye which find their expression in science and in art. So also Christ was taken to the top of a high mountain and shown all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, in a moment of time. 'All these,' said the devil, 'will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.' What an appeal the sight must have made to the mind of Christ. All knowledge and all beauty were comprehended in the vision. But know-

<sup>1</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*.



ledge that is gained without self-sacrifice is sin ; and beauty that is divorced from truth is deformity. Many a man has become eminent in science and in art through the worship of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Christ will become eminent also, but only by obeying the precept, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.'

(3) Once more, Eve saw 'that the tree was to be desired to make one wise.' There is a wisdom or experience that can be reached by man. There is a higher wisdom or experience, which belongs only to God. Eve was tempted to pass beyond the bounds of human experience—as the devil put it, to be as a God, knowing good and evil. This is the ambition which Shakespeare says was the temptation of the angels. It is the highest form of temptation that comes to man ; it is the temptation to his spiritual nature. Christ was tempted spiritually also. He was placed on the pinnacle of the Temple, and told to cast Himself down. For was it not written that the angels had charge of Him, and that He would not dash His foot against a stone ? It was the temptation to enter upon an experience to which as man He was not called. The wisdom that can arrest the laws of Nature is wisdom that belongs to God. Christ will exercise that wisdom by and by, when He goes forth to do the work of the Atonement ; but now He is being tempted as a man, and He refuses to ask God to bear with Him while He undergoes an experience to which God has not called Him.

The sin of Eve, if we may express it in a single sentence, was the seizing of that which did not belong to her, or did not belong to her yet. In time she might be wise as God to know good and evil. But at present there is mystery wrapped round the wisdom of God, and that mystery must be respected. More than that, the price must be paid. It is the experience of life, interpreted by the Spirit of God, that brings wisdom. Eve had not yet passed through that experience or paid that price. Life is the price, and, for us now at least, death is especially the price.

¶ It is an old story, that men sell themselves to the tempter, and sign a bond with their blood, because it is only to take effect at a distant day ; then rush on to snatch the cup their souls thirst after with an impulse not the less savage because there is a dark shadow beside them for evermore. There is no short cut, no patent tram-road, to

wisdom : after all the centuries of invention, the soul's path lies through the thorny wilderness which must be still trodden in solitude, with bleeding feet, with sobs for help, as it was trodden by them of old time.<sup>1</sup>

3. Eve stands in the dim doorway of history appealing to the generations of men : 'Was there ever sorrow like unto my sorrow ? I broke the charmed circle and led you into the knowledge of good and evil. Through me came the first dim movement of man towards his mysterious destiny. The serpent that tempts and haunts and would destroy the race involved me in his toils. And I bring forth children, and continue the race of man on the earth through travail and heavy sorrow.'

One wept whose only child was dead,  
New-born, ten years ago.  
'Weep not ; he is in bliss,' they said.  
She answered, 'Even so.'

Ten years ago was born in pain  
A child, not now forlorn.  
But oh, ten years ago, in vain,  
A mother, a mother was born.'<sup>2</sup>

We see her joy over her first-born. 'I have gotten a man from the Lord.' It is a modern mother's joy. The strong lusty child whom we christen Cain is always a prospect of gladness to the heart of motherhood ; he seems to promise great things. Then comes Eve's second-born, and again there is struck a modern chord. We hear, not a mother's laughter, but a mother's sigh. It is no longer the lusty Cain. It is a feeble child—a child that to all seeming a zephyr will blow away. We detect the weeping in her voice as she calls him Abel—a name suggesting 'a breath,' 'vapour,' 'vanity'—and we feel that her experience is repeated in a million maternal souls. Then in the course of years there comes what myriad mothers have seen repeated—the great reversal of the first maternal judgment. The child that woke her laughter becomes a disappointment, and the child that touched her pity becomes a glory. Cain is indeed a strong man, and Abel's life is indeed but a breath ; but, for Eve and for the world, the short-lived breath of Abel effects more than the

<sup>1</sup> George Eliot, *The Lifted Veil*.

<sup>2</sup> Alice Meynell.

massive strength of Cain. We feel again that we are in presence of the moderns, that the primitive Garden in its fading has passed into the developed city, and that the woman has become one of us in the knowledge of good and evil.

## The First Sin

Gen. iii. 1.—'Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made.'

If we read this third chapter of Genesis as being not history but what the early Christian Church suspected it of being—'moral teaching in the form of a story'—we are amazed at its truth. Here we have in a symbol the story of sin as it is all the world over—the suggestion from outside, the tampering with conscience, the false idea of liberty, the act of rebellion, the mutual encouragement to sin, the sense of shame, the consciousness of having lost our true birthright. Adam and Eve are every man and woman, and their experience is the experience of every one who sins. Can any one read this story, as a story with a moral, not as ancient history, without feeling its penetrating force? As an old Greek philosopher said, There are certain truths which seize us by the hair of our head and drag us to assent; and this is one.

1. The first teaching of Genesis with regard to sin is that it comes in a snake-like manner. Let us banish from our minds all fantastic embellishments about the Temptation of Eve. What the writer tells us is simply that temptation to do wrong came to mankind like the movement of a serpent. There may have been in the mind of the writer some idea of counteracting the serpent-worship prevalent in ancient times by representing the reptile as the enemy of the race. But how better could he have described the truth with which every child of Adam is familiar? How do thoughts come to us? A thought of anger bursts into our mind like a roaring lion. An elevating thought lifts us up as on the wings of an eagle. The insinuating suggestions of evil are like nothing so much as the sinuous, almost imperceptible, gliding of a serpent. The sense of hopelessness, of the growing power and increasing toils of the thing which has seized a man, is well suggested in the famous Laocoon statuary group. So sin slides into life and takes com-

mand. Every one of us recognizes at once this serpent-thing which crossed the path of Mother Eve that fateful day.

2. We are made to see also how temptation succeeds at first by exciting the curiosity of its victim. It never does show itself at first in its true light, as an evil thing. It is merely curious and interesting. No man means to sin—at first. 'Our great security against sin lies in being shocked at it.' Eve gazed and reflected when she should have fled.

And then, when the voice of temptation is listened to, there are three well-known steps by which a soul goes down into sin.

✓ (1) There is *distortion of God's prohibition*. The serpent-thing wilfully distorts God's words to Adam. God had never said that he must not eat of any tree of the garden. There was only the one upon which the Divine veto was placed. That is a form of suggestion that is very common. Religion is misrepresented as a wholesale kill-joy, laying its arbitrary veto on all the pleasures of life. And we may listen to that insinuation; but we know all the time it is a lie. God has not forbidden the good things of life: it is He who has given us them richly to enjoy. The thing that He does forbid is the thing that we know we have no business with, the thing which, if we dare dally with it, will finally drag us down.

¶ Francis Thompson was led astray by the thought that Christianity was a prison-house, and Christ the world's master kill-joy. In his own wild words:

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;

I fled Him, down the arches of the years;

I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways

Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears

I hid from Him, and under running laughter.

And he makes the reason for his flight from Christ quite explicit:

Yet was I sore adread  
Lest, having Him, I must have naught beside.

(2) The next step after this wilful distortion of the truth is *the weakening of the Divine restrictions*. 'Hath God said?' is the doubt that creeps into the mind. Distortion is followed by the



insinuation of doubt: is this religious restriction of life not a purely artificial one, a conventional barrier? So is our loyalty to the great safeguards of social well-being loosened, and we soon find ourselves saying Yes where God has said No. 'Whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him,' was the way in which Ecclesiastes put the same truth. When we permit ourselves to bring in question the religious disciplines that have restrained us and our neighbours, and cast doubt upon the paramount importance of the moral law, and the Bible, and the dictates of conscience, we have opened the gate to an unrelenting enemy of our peace, individual and social.

¶ Louis XIV. of France had an old gardener who looked after the palace grounds at Versailles. A true lover of flowers, the old man put his very best into his work. But the king's courtiers, the noblemen and the great ladies, had nothing of his love of floral beauty, and in their strolls among the beautiful terraces and graceful parterres ruthlessly destroyed the cunning labour of the old man's skilful hands. At last he could endure it no longer. He went into the august presence of his royal master and laid his complaints. Could not the king do something to prevent such wanton destruction in the palace gardens? The king was moved by his appeal and gave instructions that little tablets or labels—called 'etiquette'—should be arranged along the sides of the flower-beds, and a royal order was issued commanding all the courtiers to walk carefully within the 'etiquette.'

✓(3) And from that distortion and doubt there follows without difficulty a *flat denial*. This serpent-thing goes on to deny the threat, to pooh-pooh the idea of punishment. 'Ye shall not surely die.' On the one side the clear and definite command of God, 'Thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.' On the one side the clear enunciation of the law of moral health and spiritual life; on the other the denial of it under the stress of the temptation of the moment.

3. The last stage in the history of a sin is the awakening of remorse and the agony of the sense of guilt. 'They knew that they were naked.' The guilty pair feel as if their sin were being shouted from the tree-tops and the

birds of the air were carrying their awful secret. Where, in all the range of literature, will one find a more striking or true picture of the whole miserable business? How we all grasp at excuses, as thin and flimsy as the leaves with which our first parents sought to screen themselves. The moment we do wrong we become uneasy and alarmed. We can no longer look the whole world in the face. 'Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all.'

¶ My colleague at the City Temple told me of a young fellow whom a friend of his tried to save, and in the end succeeded, I am glad to say. This poor lad was an adopted son; he seemed to have inherited a weak nature, or if he did not inherit one—for I do not think there is so very much in heredity, after all—at any rate, loose habits, unworthy behaviour, evil company, engendered in him a course of action, and created a character in itself evil. He robbed his adoptive parents, and fled from home. When he was found and brought back almost to the doorstep he refused to enter. 'Why? Are you afraid to face them?' The answer was, 'I cannot look them in the eye.'<sup>1</sup>

And how readily the sinner blames others for his faults! We say that circumstances proved too much for us, or else we cry out against society or our inherited temperament.

¶ An excuse for sin is a statement of the circumstances under which a man did wrong. When we say, 'I could not help it; circumstances were too much for me,' do our hearts believe it to be true? We say, 'My temperament, my inherited appetite, business exigencies, irresistible pressure,' as though we were compelled to do wrong. The first man in the long line of apologetic succession said, 'The woman tempted me,' he could not say, 'and made me eat.' Whatever he might wish implied, he could only say, 'And I did eat.' No unconsenting soul can be made to sin, and so sin is inexcusable.<sup>2</sup>

How every touch in the story tells! We are told with profound significance that 'the Lord God made coats of skins and clothed them.' There already may be a foreshadowing of the fact of sacrifice and all the entails of sin. Animals have to be slaughtered in order to provide covering for the sinners. Every act of sin affects more than the one who commits it. Others are involved, directly or indirectly, in our wrong-

<sup>1</sup> R. J. Campbell.

<sup>2</sup> M. D. Babcock.

doing. And it is ever God Himself, as the writer indicates, who relieves man's intolerable sense of shame and of moral nakedness. It is He alone who can restore that peace of mind of which sin has robbed him.

We go out self-exiled from the garden of innocent childhood, and wander far; but still the love of God follows us. If there is no way back to innocence, there is a way forward to triumph. The writer puts it in this way. He says that, when Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden, God held out to them the hope that their descendants would yet crush the head of the serpent, though the serpent would always keep striking at their heel—the foot, by which a man makes progress. This, then, is the solemn, rebuking, yet comforting truth—that though we have as a race and as individuals shut ourselves out from much that would have made life a better thing than it is, nevertheless we are not engaged on a hopeless struggle in striving both to rise ourselves and to help others to do so also. And the prize is still within the grasp of every striving soul. For the promise runs, 'To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.'

### Curiosity Concerning Evil

Gen. iii. 5.—'Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.'

1. To penetrate disguises, to unravel complicated plots, to solve mysteries—this is always inviting to the human mind. The tale which used to thrill us in childhood of the one locked room, the one forbidden key, bears in it a truth for men as well as for children. What is hidden must, we conclude, have some interest for us—else why hide it from us? If anything appears to be secret, we feel we must know it. So every man of us, especially in the opening years of manhood, is curious concerning evil. But we have to distinguish between two forms of that curiosity. We may have a curiosity to know evil directly through participation, or we may have a curiosity to know about it merely by observation. Concerning the former of these, it is extremely easy to make pronouncement. There are no problems and no difficulties here. Evil is evil, and no amount of curiosity excuses

it. Here we must come down with a strong, definite, vertebrate judgment, 'this thing is wrong, and I will not do it.'

But as regards the latter it is more easy to deceive ourselves. We do not propose to go over the line. We intend only to satisfy ourselves mentally. We shall not enter the forbidden room, but shall just put our heads round the door, or peep through the key-hole. We are quite sure that we shall not go any farther. We are far too sensible, and, incidentally, far too good, to step over the line. We shall simply satisfy our curiosity, and then be peaceable citizens for the rest of our days. There are multitudes of men who are thus curious about evil, are interested in it, who want to know more about it, and in weak little ways are gratifying that curiosity. To any still, small voices that disturb them they answer, 'Where is the harm? We, at any rate, run no risk.'

¶ The China Inland missionaries, Miss Mildred Cable and Miss Francesca French, speaking of the deceptive sights and sounds of the desert, write as follows: 'The travellers listened, thought and pondered their own ignorance, while the Gobi warned them: "Hold your curiosity in check. There is no need for you to explore every avenue of questionable knowledge. In this trackless waste where every restriction is removed and where you are beckoned and lured in all directions, your safety is in austerity and deliberately accepted limitations. One narrow way is the only road for you. In the great and terrible wilderness push on with eyes blinded to the deluding mirage, your ears deaf to the call of the seducer, and your mind undiverted from the goal."'<sup>1</sup>

2. There is a good deal more than risk in proceeding to satisfy ourselves mentally. In the first place, filling our minds with knowledge about evil tends to deprive us of our supreme safeguard against it, namely, our power of being shocked at it. Is not that true? We know more of the world than once we did. Have we the same noble sensitiveness as once we had? Let a man contrast himself in this matter with the lad that once he was, and reflect awhile.

¶ It is said that when the Chinese fowler sees a number of ducks settled on a pool and wants to catch them, he lets float out from him two or three large hollow gourds. These gourds

<sup>1</sup> *Something Happened*, 192.



float among the ducks. At first the birds are shy of them, but finding that no harm comes to them from the gourds, they soon swim about without fear. When the fowler sees this familiarity, he places over his head a similar gourd shell, with holes to see and breathe through, and wades slowly into the water up to his shoulders. By stealthy steps he gets in among the ducks. As soon as he is near enough he seizes a fowl by the legs, draws it under the water, fastens it to his girdle, and then proceeds to grasp another, until his girdle is full; when he wades out of the water again, and returns with his prizes.

Secondly, to the strong, experience alone satisfies curiosity. Here, familiarity breeds, not contempt, but desire. Apart from the ministrations of God, we will taste, as well as want to know about, evil. It is a fearful and a wonderful thing that at this time of day men should think that they can nibble at sin and remain safe; that they can, so to speak, amuse themselves with iniquity outside office hours and yet keep the heart secure. Do we not know ourselves better than that? Listen to this description of a man's inner life that has been left for us. He is one who was carnal, sold under sin; who, what he hated, that he did; who could not find how to perform the good; who, when he would do good, found evil present with him; who was a wretched man, of all men most miserable. Who was that? Why, Paul, the strongest of the saints. So do not let lesser men boast too securely.

The ill we deem we ne'er could do,  
 In thought we dramatize;  
 What we should loathe, we learn to scan  
 With speculative eyes.  
 Alas! for ignorance profound  
 Of our poor nature's bent!  
 The wakened sympathy with wrong  
 Becomes the will's consent.

In the third place, if it should so happen that, through prudence or cowardice, a man remains righteous in act while base in desire, the gratification of curiosity leaves him permanently evil-curious. There is such a thing as the 'homing instinct of the mind.' We read with interest sometimes of the wonderful powers, which those specially trained birds have, that, when set loose, even far at sea, at once spread their

wings and make flight straight for the place of their home. After such manner are the minds that God has given us. At times they are chained. They are restrained by the compulsions of our daily tasks. But then evening comes and they are set free, and they also set their wings and fly unto their own place. What a destiny that suggests for those whose delight is in the base. Take heed unto the awful words, 'He that is filthy, let him be filthy still.'

Let us turn our curiosity upon the good and be anxious to know the secrets of heroism and of sacrifice and of righteousness, rather than the secrets of baseness and of lust. After all, in a universe which has been created by the Un-created Loveliness, there are fair regions and to spare in which the mind may wander. Our business is, with God's help, to exercise the thought in them, so that each day will bring with it some fresh discovery of beauty, some fresh display of loveliness, and some new unravelling of the great secret, which is the secret of the friendship of God towards them that fear Him.

¶ 'High, healthful, pure thinking can be encouraged, promoted and strengthened,' says William James. 'Its current can be turned upon grand ideals until it wears a channel. By means of such discipline the mental horizon can be flooded with the sunshine of beauty, wholeness and harmony. To inaugurate pure and lofty thinking may at first seem difficult, even almost mechanical, but perseverance will first render it easy, then pleasant, and finally delightful.'

## Haunting Voices

Gen. iii. 8.—'And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.'

THOUGH our first parents when they sinned lost much, they did not lose this—the voice of God was in their ears, haunting the Garden and haunting their life. Adam and his wife had once walked familiarly with God, confident and childlike, without shame and without fear. But now an immense spiritual distance intervened between the creature and the Creator. All the old intimacy was over. Man was a child no longer; and God was changed and far away and fearful. Still, far as he had fallen from his place in the Divine friendship, man

was not beyond the sound of the Divine voice. If his soul had sinned, his ears were not deafened to the heavenly tones; and still 'they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.'

1. There is something here that is true, not of religion only, but of life. We may be parted from many things in life—from old places and persons and experiences—still we are not done with them. There are voices that come to us from all that has ever been.

We are separated from many things—it may be by force of circumstances; it may be by our own fault. Many ways the changes come; and old scenes are left behind, old companions drop out of sight, dear presences vanish. Some of the things we lose are very precious. The love of a parent or a friend, the inspiration of a great teacher, the soul-moving power of some great experience—these have been with us and they have gone from us. Still, however far we may drift from our past, we never lose our memories. We never lose the capacity of being affected by the power of that which we once knew; and when the influences of former things come upon us, how they touch and thrill the heart! The voices out of the past may come to us with a wistful sadness of regret. Or they may be inspiring and heart-stirring, bracing us for work and conflict. But we always hear them. No density of overshadowing forgetfulness is so heavy, the leaves of the gathering years can never cluster so thickly about us, that we shall hear no more those voices from the past.

¶ Charles Reade in one of the best of his novels tells a story of some Australian miners. He tells how they travelled through a long summer Sunday to hear the singing of a captive thrush. And they were reckless men, familiar with all riot, but when they heard it there fell a hush upon them, for it brought back memories of the green lanes again, and of England where they had been boys.<sup>1</sup>

2. Now what the text does is to apply this truth about life to its highest and holiest experience. There is profound spiritual truth beneath all the simplicity of this chapter. It tells us that the ideal life, and so the first life, is this—when God dwells with man and

walks with him and speaks with him, when man does not fear God and has no cause to fear Him, but walks like a happy child with God through the pleasant places. And it tells us that even when we fall from this first life, when its happiness is broken, whatever takes us away from it or comes between us and God, He does not cease to be an encompassing presence to us and a voice living and often loud. We hear still the sound of His coming through all the screens we make to hide us; and we know and feel that He is near.

The place of our life, like that Garden, is haunted by His presence; and God comes to us along every path, comes to us in spite of ourselves. We are beset by His approaches and appeals and all the wonder of His seeking love. Does not this explain experience? Some early and simple religious teaching long forgotten—you thought you had outgrown it, left it far behind; but it returns to your memory and moves you strangely, and you are almost on your knees. Or there are times when you are overcome by sudden emotion, or carried away in some train of thought that you cannot explain. The melting mood, the strange reverie—whence comes it? It subdues and softens you, and makes you think of better things. Some event in your life—a great danger, a great trouble overhanging you, a great sorrow—some event brings you face to face with the Unseen Power that rules all things, and rules your life and whom you cannot escape. Or, most of all, in the stirrings and strivings of conscience, the sense of guilt and all the anxiety that comes to earnest men as they look upon their life, He lays His hand upon you.

Not the first man only, but every man since who once knew God and then lost Him, who once prayed and then ceased to pray, who once walked like a child with his Father and then forsook the home of his soul, is visited by the conviction that he is not left to himself. There is Another seeking him still; and he hears again the voice in the garden in the cool of the day.

¶ Men may pass a church and hear a snatch of a psalm, and the Eternal Lord draws near to them. They may catch sight of a crane shaped like a cross against the sky, and they may whisper as Thackeray once did to John Brown of Edinburgh, 'Calvary!' They will always be exposed to His approach in the touch of death,

<sup>1</sup> G. H. Morrison.



or in the smile of a child—in the clouds of heaven, which are the dust of His feet, or upon the everlasting hills, or in the deeps which speak of His judgments. Most of all is it hopeless for those who have ever known Him to escape from the memory of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

3. And notice that this was the time when God appeared—‘in the cool of the day.’ Literally ‘at the wind of the day’—when it was evening and the air was cool, when the evening breeze springs up, and comes playing, rustling, whispering among the leaves. At eventide when the sun is setting and the land is still, when the shadows gather, when the lights are dim, and the noises are quiet, and the heart of man is hushed—we know the restful, reverent, pensive mood that comes in that still hour.

Everything in this old story has a meaning ; and we know how much this means—the influence of evening, of the twilight. Then we hear the voices we cannot hear when our work fills our hands and occupies our thoughts, when we are distracted and excited, when the noise and the tumult of the world drown the higher voices. But at evening we are released and hushed and subdued—restful, thoughtful, sensitive. All that is best in our nature seems then to be alert. When the shadows close around, when the lights are dim, when memory broods, in the cool of the day, when the hot passions have spent their fires, we grow self-conscious and God-conscious. We may try to hide, if we will ; but the wind—the Spirit blowing where it lists—as it comes up at eventide, stirs the inmost recesses of being, and reveals the trembling, apprehensive self. It was from the power of what had been that our first parents felt the hopelessness of trying to escape. The quieter the Garden grew, the clearer sounded the Voice.

We may believe that God will make such a time for us. He will bring us to an hour when the conditions will help us like the hush of evening, when the fever and strife are quiet and we hear God. It may come in the time we have to spend in a sick-room—in the long days and weary nights. It may come on a journey, in a strange city, when we feel lonely and far from home. It may come in some great sorrow, when our heart is hushed, and when we are alive to the unseen as never before. God will make

<sup>1</sup> E. Shillito, *Poetry and Prayer*, 118.

for us such a time, like the cool of the day, quiet and solemn and wistful and ready for His revealings.

4. What God has to say we must hear each for himself. But what we need to remember is this—that everything depends on how we act when we hear the voice of God. They heard His voice ; and they hid themselves ; and, hiding, they heard again. Would they stay in the shadow, ashamed and afraid ? Or would they go out to meet Him ? Surely this is what we must do. When God calls, let us meet Him in the open, hiding nothing. Hear the voice of the Lord God and go out to meet Him ; and His word will be merciful, whatever it appoints for you.

Where do we hear the voice of God as we hear it in Christ ? We hear Him best in the tender tones of the Son of Man who walked this world, and whose voice ever since has haunted this earth of ours as it haunts our life. The Christ of God, with His words of grace and gospel, of invitation and pardon and promise—these are the words of God if Divine words were ever heard by men. When Jesus Christ and His gospel touch our hearts, it is the voice of God that speaks. It is a voice Divine in depth of meaning and tenderness and pleading power. ‘Hear Him.’

## The Long Conflict

Gen. iii. 15.—‘I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed ; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.’

THIS passage has been named the *Protevangelium*, the first Gospel. It is possible, no doubt, to read too much into it. Many of the older expositors regard it as a kind of doctrinal ox-in-a-teacup, which might be legitimately watered down into many gallons of theology. One Reformation teacher deduces from it all the chief doctrines of the New Testament, and pictures Adam and Eve expounding its contents in frequent discourses to their children. It is possible to avoid such absurdities and yet feel to the full the extraordinary impressiveness of the conception. Man, even shut from the garden and doomed to the wilderness, is not altogether outcast : he is a king dethroned, but he has

it in him still to be a warrior king and to recover his heritage : he has yielded to the earth-spirit, yet the heavens do not lose their grasp of man and he is not to lose his hope of recovery.

Crudely but powerfully, as in some great sculptured conception, that hope expresses itself in pictorial and symbolic form. One thought breaks into three. There is to be enmity—a blood-feud between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. There is to be no easy victory for the seed of the woman—man is not to escape unwounded from the fray, but is to win only at the cost of his own suffering and loss. Yet that seed of the woman is ultimately to be victorious ; wounded though man may be, he is to bruise the serpent's head—the earth-spirit, victorious so often, is to be trampled and destroyed. Put more shortly, the first Gospel is a Gospel of Hate, a Gospel of Pain and Struggle, but finally a Gospel of Love and Hope.

1. The Gospel of Hate is set in the forefront of this strange utterance. 'I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed'—enmity ! According to this ancient oracle there is a religion of enmity which has come with a Divine sanction, to fulfil a Divine purpose. This is not the ugly, unbrotherly enmity between man and man, but the enmity between man and evil. There is to be this blood-feud between the two seeds, because it cannot be allowed that the earth should be left at the mercy of the beast. God still claims foothold in His own inheritance, and He honours man by giving him a will and a conscience which are the advance guard of the final army of occupation. Enmity in this sense is the condition of all lofty living ; it is one side of love and of the love of love ; it is the first faint, stern glimpse of a better world and of the way to produce it. It is not all that man needs for his redemption, but it is something, and it may be the beginning of a great deal more.

Experience justifies in a thousand ways this gospel of hate. A mother will deal somewhat after this fashion with her child at a very early stage in his education. She wants to put enmity between his little heart and some things he may be all too ready to love. She teaches him to hate lying and cruelty, laziness and selfishness ; and if he begins by hating some of these things for the sake of their consequences, her hope is

that by and by he will learn to hate them simply because they are hateful. We shall not misinterpret Adam and Eve if we take them as a picture of humanity in its childhood. Humanity needed to be taught, and taught early, the secret of a noble hatred, and, once implanted, it has never entirely died away. In the worst and weakest sinner who has ever tried to sate himself with forbidden fruit there is deep down a weariness of his sin, and a more or less conscious wish that he could have been the conqueror of the serpent rather than its victim. And as to the public service which this gift of a noble hatred has rendered, we have only to imagine what the world would have been without its active and constant protest against wrong.

¶ 'The Enthusiasm of Humanity,' says the author of *Ecce Homo*, 'does indeed destroy a great deal of hatred, but it creates as much more. Selfish hatred is indeed charmed away, but a not less fiery passion takes its place. Dull serpentine malice dies, but a new unselfish anger begins to live.'

2. The message of hate shades into a message of struggle and pain. The point is that, while humanity is called to this conflict, the conflict is not to be without tremendous cost. The earth-spirit has great power upon the earth ; no one who goes against him, like St George against the dragon, is likely to escape with skin whole and bones unbroken. 'Thou shalt bruise his heel.' There is a picture in the words, a mystic but intelligible device stamped here upon the title-page of the history of redemption. Man is a strong wrestler grappling with the serpent, his feet already upon its coils. But the serpent seizes its chance and stings the heel that is pressed upon it. So man, even if he fights gallantly and victoriously, fights wounded and in pain, with his endurance sorely tested and his strength weakened in the way.

¶ There is a well-known passage in Hawthorne's *Transformation* in which the writer passes criticism on a famous picture by Guido Reni which hangs in the Church of the Capuchins at Rome. The picture represents the Archangel Michael triumphing over the Evil One. The Archangel, clad in bright armour and holding in his hand a drawn sword, has one foot planted upon the head of Satan, who, in the form of a dragon or serpent, writhes



beneath him. A sense of victory, not unmingled with defiance, shines on the Archangel's face; while Satan's every feature is distorted with suffering and hate. The Archangel—so Hawthorne objects—has come out of the contest far too easily. His appearance and attitude give no idea of the death-struggle which always takes place before vice can be overcome by virtue. His sword should have been streaming with blood; his armour dented and crushed; he should not have been placing his foot delicately upon his prostrate foe, but pressing it down hard as if his very life depended upon the result.

There is good in humanity, and the good, if we take history as a whole, is moving on to victory. But where shall we find a good unwounded and unweakened, or a better and a best which has not the trail of the worst over it somewhere? Even when the world is making progress, it limps and halts in its progress. There are many brave soldiers of Christ, many loving and unselfish hearts, many true believers who have been sure of the unseen realities, many heroic spirits in whom the Divine enmity against evil has been kindled, who have set themselves to wrestle with the earth-spirit and trample it underfoot. But the best and bravest are bitten by the serpent they are fighting: their strength is never without its weakness nor their stand without its stumble. We say to them, as Sidney Lanier said to the great spirits of the centuries:

Full bright ye shine, insuperable stars;  
Yet, if a man look hard upon you, none  
With total lustre blazeth, no, not one  
But hath some heinous freckle of the flesh  
Upon his shining cheek, not one but winks  
His ray, opaqued with intermittent mist  
Of defect; yea, you masters all must ask  
Some sweet forgiveness, which we leap to give.

In the language of this passage, the serpent's fang has a strange power to pierce even the champions of God. The worst wounds and weakens the best. If they overcome, they overcome with a struggle. If they attain, they attain by the Royal Way of the Cross. And they will carry the scars of battle with them in the hour of their victory.

3. But the sublime thing about this *Protevangeliūm* is that it is above all a message of

hope and love. There is something worthy of God, something characteristic of His gracious purpose, thus early to set upon the battlefield, where all are wounded and weakened, and where many fail, a most clear and blessed sign of promise. 'He shall bruise thy head.' A wound in the heel may be painful and disabling, but it is local, temporary, curable; but the crushing of the head is death. And it is the spirit of man and not the earth-spirit that is finally to be left in possession of the field. So, even into the world's dim morning, before men knew all that the struggle was to mean or how long it was to last, there broke, like a shaft of sunlight, this forecast of deliverance.

We see not yet this great thing happening, but, like the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, we see Jesus. So the interpreters of the Christian ages have not been wrong if, when they have gazed upon this rainbow-arch of hope spanning the wilderness, they have seen, framed in it and not dwarfed by it, the Cross of Jesus. His heart was fuller than any other of that holy hatred of evil which is a part of the holy energy of love. His wound-prints tell the cost of the warfare with evil, even to One who never had the serpent's poison in His veins. And the high throne where He now sits with God tells how perfect was His victory—how perfect also may be man's ultimate victory through Him.

## The Blessing of a Curse

Gen. iii. 17.—'Cursed is the ground for thy sake.'

1. 'I HAVE learned,' says Michael Fairless in *The Roadmender*, 'I have learned to understand dimly the truths of three great paradoxes—the blessing of a curse, the voice of silence, the companionship of solitude.' The blessing of a curse—that is it exactly. Mercies often masquerade.

'Cursed is the ground.' Yes, but who has not realized the blessing which is hidden in the curse? God laid restrictions upon the land in order that, by means of the restriction, man might be helped to recover his freedom. Man fell by disobedience, and his relationship with God was perverted. He was afflicted with spiritual crookedness. How to recover his straightness, his rectitude—that was the problem. It could be done only by the wonder-

ful ministry of the boundless grace of God. And yet that grace works upon the soul not only in direct and immediate constraints, but also indirectly and mediately in a thousand different ways. For one thing it curses the ground, so that the ground holds its harvests in bonds until they are released by human toil. And so labour becomes imperative, and man has to work for his living, and his labour is the medium of Divine grace. The ground is cursed so that the man may be blessed. When he works for a living his work is to aid him in the recovery of a life. And who has not tasted this blessing, which was thus enshrined in a curse? Honest labour drains away many a bad humour from the soul. 'What a blessing it was I had some work to do!' That is the thankful utterance of millions of people, and they are finding their blessing in an original curse. The ground was cursed for their sake.

Get leave to work

In this world—'tis the best you get at all;  
For God, in cursing, gives us better gifts  
Than men in benediction.<sup>1</sup>

¶ Mrs Gummidge—as every reader of *David Copperfield* knows full well—was a 'lone, lorn creetur'. She said so herself, and nobody ought to know better. 'My troubles has made me contrary,' she moaned. 'I had better go into the workhouse and die. I am a lone, lorn creetur', and had much better not make myself contrary here.'

Such was Mrs Gummidge! The years passed, but they brought no improvement either in the old lady herself or in her dark surroundings. Indeed, they brought at last a blinding, staggering calamity when all the lights of Peggotty's little cottage on Yarmouth Beach seemed to be suddenly and cruelly blown out.

Mr Peggotty was about to start off in his long sad search for his darling but prodigal daughter—'little Em'ly.' 'You'll be a solitary woman here, I'm afeard,' said Mr Peggotty. 'No, no, Dan'l,' she returned—and such words from Mrs Gummidge seemed like the blithe song of the nightingale suddenly breaking forth from the throat of a raven;—'I shan't be that. Don't you mind me! I shall have enough to do to keep a home for you again you come back, Dan'l!'

And David Copperfield—that is to say, Charles

<sup>1</sup> E. B. Browning.

Dickens—burst into wondering admiration at the sudden and extraordinary transformation.

'What a change in Mrs Gummidge in a little time! She was another woman. She was so devoted, she had such a quick perception of what it would be well to say, and what it would be well to leave unsaid; she was so forgetful of herself, and so regardful of the sorrow about her, that I held her in a sort of veneration. The work she did that day! . . . As to deploring her misfortune, she appeared to have entirely lost the recollection of ever having had any. . . In short, I left her, when I went away at night, the prop and staff of Mr Peggotty's affliction; and I could not meditate enough upon the lesson that I read in Mrs Gummidge, and the new experience she unfolded to me.'<sup>1</sup>

2. And how is it with the sorrows which sometimes leap upon us like lions from the thicket? We are dazed by the attack. Our united life was so sweet and simple; it was fragrant and lovely as a garden. And then death swooped down upon us, the garden became an open grave, and all our ways were darkened. But grace broke through the gloom. The Lord was in the stricken garden. Angel presences whispered of resurrection. Yes, and there was another helper when everything seemed to be shaking. We had our work. 'I don't know what I should have done if I had had nothing to do!' Our work was a means of grace, steadying our powers in days and nights of confusion.

The story of Mary Magdalene is one of the sweetest idylls in our Christian literature. Mary stood amidst the lilies and the angels—representatives of the glory of two worlds—and wept! 'Jesus saith unto her: Why weepest thou? . . . Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.' And Mary left the lilies and the angels—and the weeping. She lost her misery in finding a mission. More often than we fancy it is toil that dries our tears.

¶ Sir Walter Scott used work to keep his mind from brooding on the downfall of his life's great scheme. His *Journal* is an unpretentious record of a noble life, revealing his brave true soul. The manner in which he buckled to his task (sometimes when the page he was writing waltzed before his eyes), the manly way in which he faced his trouble and buried his grief, the patience with

<sup>1</sup> F. W. Boreham.



intruding visitors when all the time he was aching to get back to work, move us with mingled pity and admiration. With pain of body and sorrow of heart and sickness of soul he battled on, and in his own conduct illustrated the words which long years before he had caused to be carved on his dial-stone at Abbotsford, 'I must work while it is called day; for the night cometh when no man can work.'

3. We have lived long enough to see the blessing of this supposed curse, and to know that the real curse to a people is when they can stretch out their hands and feed without labour. In climates where the earth is bountiful and little labour is needed for a subsistence the race is enervated and there is no spur to progress. Some time ago a writer in one of our reviews had this to say about 'The City of Enchantments': 'In Naples and its enchanting environs, the softness of the climate and the richness of the soil have been the curses of an indolent and superstitious people. . . . The women do the work; the men loaf about their orange-gardens, lounge over their nets, or sleep away the hours of the sunshine. . . . It is a melancholy look-out, and the dry rot of inveterate indolence seems inherent in the race.' Life cannot be kept sweet and true apart from the filling up of time by useful labour. Idleness relaxes all our powers by wrapping the soul in a softening atmosphere of enervation. That is why men who retire too early from business speedily go to pieces. They have lost something vital. They have dismissed one of life's angels, and the tonic has gone from their roads.

Let us thank God for the blessing of labour. Let us praise Him for all restrictions which demand our toil. Let us be grateful for the ground that was cursed. In working to release the energies of the earth we help our own emancipation.

## The Lost Eden

Gen. iii. 24.—'So he drove out the man.'

THE story of Eden in Genesis faces up to the problem: What is the curse that infects our world? Why is man born to sorrow? Why do labour and pain and death dog his footsteps? Man is created with great potentiality for delight,

yet his delight is so thwarted as rather to mock him than to satisfy him; with great potentiality for beautiful achievement, yet his vision always outreaches his grasp, and he has the pain of an endless search without the glory of arrival. What means all this unsatisfied hunger, this weary battle? 'As the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare, so are the sons of men snared in an evil time.'

All the ages have beaten their wings against this cage—this mystery of unescapable toil and grief into which we are all born. Each new generation may imagine, in its hot eager youth, that it will smash through the bars and win to liberty and Paradise; but after a while it, too, settles down under the iron discipline of earth. Eden is a lost treasure. We feel it as a *lost* treasure because of the ineradicable instinct in us that we ultimately belong to, and have rights in, a sphere of life different from, and better than, that which we now know. A Golden Age is our inheritance; why, then, do we live through interminable Iron Ages? Well! the full answer to that query may be very long and complex—embracing, indeed, all philosophy. But this old story of Eden puts a finger on a salient point in it, and is content to say: 'We toil and sweat in the wilderness because there is moral defect in us. We were intended for Eden, but we are unworthy of it.' As it is disobedience that brings trouble to childhood, so the word 'disobedience' is uttered by this old childlike literature as the indispensable key to unlock the great mystery of the troubled state of mankind.

¶ The story of Eden reduces to a practical form the noble legend of the Golden Age, cherished especially in prehistoric Greece. It wisely teaches us to look to misused free-will as the source of all the sin, and mainly of the accompanying misery, which still overflow the world, and environ human life like a moral deluge. It shows us man in his childhood, no less responsible for disobedience to simple command, than man in his manhood for contravention of those laws of essential right and wrong which remain now and for ever clothed with the majesty of Divine command.<sup>1</sup>

1. Two fundamental intuitions, surely, lie at the root of the story of Eden—the intuition of a bliss potentially ours, and the intuition of a law

<sup>1</sup> W. E. Gladstone.

we have transgressed. The impulses of desire and of conscience together have made men dream of Paradise as a thing humanity has lost. The placing of it in the far past is but a token of our feeling that God's intention for us was altogether good and delightful. The blessed life is His original and abiding ideal. And it is our human defect of will that prevents its present realization. The more man comes to trust in God as love almighty—able to control and re-shape to His own splendid purpose the vagaries and rebellions of human self-will—the more clearly will Eden loom up ahead of us as a state still to be won. Yet it must always seem a thing regained when we arrive at it. We shall have got to the place we were born to belong to. And so the pursuit of blessedness has always struck men as if it were the retrieving of a lost good, the return home after exile; and the Eden we are bound for has been pictured on the far horizon behind us as the place we issued from. Just as a man driven to travel eastward sees the sun receding behind him as if it were to be irretrievably lost, only to find after journeying through the darkness that the sun is in front of him again, so humanity has travelled onward feeling that its Golden Age had sunk behind it, while in reality its every step was bringing it nearer to that age's dawn—rising in miraculous splendour upon undiscovered hills.

2. But there is another more particular reason for thus placing the Golden Age behind us. It is the dawning of sex-consciousness which, with all its perturbations and introspective doubts and new explosive desires, puts an end to the innocent Eden of childhood and drives us out into the adult world of labour and anxiety, of pain and disillusionment. Childhood, no doubt, has a rudimentary knowledge of good and evil, but this first becomes urgent—engrossingly and even oppressively urgent—in adolescence, when the awareness of sex and the power of sex begin to fill life with grave responsibility. We realize unexpected dangers in our very constitution. The body, with its new-found passions, is seen to be perilous. And even the purest flowering of love into happy marriage brings the need of labour and self-denial—the sweat of toil and the pain of travail—in such a way as to take us into a world far different from the cloistered garden of childhood. That lies closed behind us for ever, beyond our power to re-enter. We are

now in the wilderness, where we must create our own oasis by stern resolution, or else wander in misery. Every boy is Adam, and every girl is Eve, and the closed gates of Eden with their flaming sword are the symbol of unrecoverable childhood.

Happy those early dayes, when I  
Shin'd in my Angell-infancy!  
Before I understood this place  
Appointed for my second race,  
Or taught my soul to fancy ought  
But a white, celestially thought;  
When yet I had not walkt above  
A mile or two from my first Love,  
And looking back, at that short space,  
Could see a glimpse of his bright face;

Before I taught my tongue to wound  
My conscience with a sinfull sound,  
Or had the black art to dispence  
A sev'rall sinne to ev'ry sense,  
But felt through all this fleshly dresse  
Bright shootes of everlastingnesse.

O how I long to travell back,  
And tread again that ancient track!

But ah! my soul with too much stay  
Is drunk, and staggers in the way!

In one sense Eden is lost in the process of our inevitable growth toward maturity, but a more tragic meaning is intended in the allegory in Genesis. We are all bound to pass out of moral ignorance into the knowledge of good and evil. God intends us to arrive at moral knowledge; and we cannot choose the good until we have perceived evil as evil. But is sin, then, necessary to our growth? Not if by sin we mean wilful transgression of a recognized law. And the Genesis story bases itself upon the fact that such wilful sin exists. Adam and Eve have already won the consciousness of good and evil in their awareness of God's edict. But alas! men will not really learn save by bitter experience. There must indeed be a process of trial and error which first reveals what is right; that is the giving of the Divine edict. But men have not been content to be so taught. They have guiltily persisted in recognized wrong, and drawn upon themselves bitter penalties. It is this fact that the story of the Fall emphasizes. The sorrow of our lot comes through transgres-



sion—not merely through blundering mismanagement of our experiments in life, but through wilful disobedience to laws already recognized and confessed. Error may be inevitable, as a child learns to walk by inevitable tumbles. But the Fall is not an error; it is a crime. The story of Eden does not attempt to explain philosophically the origin of sin, nor to fit the fact of sin into any theory of God's providence or man's evolution, nor to trace the passage of error into guilt. It does not explain where the tempting serpent comes from, and why he comes. It is content to press home the fact that man, as he emerges out of the moral ignorance of infancy, becomes aware of a moral law in the world which he nevertheless disobeys; and it is this deliberate disobedience that turns him out of his garden of peace.

The story of Eden preaches no gospel; it only symbolizes the facts which make a gospel necessary. There is a way out of the ruin, but only through the grace of God, not through mere human ingenuity. 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord.' It needs a new spirit infused into us by God to lift us from our falls. But that Spirit is available. 'We fall to rise,' says Browning. So, with God's grace, it may be. If man falls, God stoops after him; and the world that might have been is still the world that may be. That is our hope. It is no use slurring over our guilt. We have sinned by our own fault, our own most grievous fault. But God's grace is stronger than our wilfulness; and the world, which our wanton folly has brought to such ruin, shall, by that grace of His, be restored.

## The Barred Gate and the Open Door

Gen. iii. 24.—'So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden the Cherubim, and the flame of a sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life' (R.V.).

Rev. xxi. 25.—'And the gates thereof shall in no wise be shut by day (for there shall be no night there)' (R.V.).

THE Bible opens with the story of a closed gate; it ends with a description of a city which has an ever-open door. It opens with the account of the expulsion of a man from a happy garden and the setting of an angel with a flaming sword at the gate to prevent his return. It ends with

a picture of a city—whose glory and blessedness pass all human speech—and that city has a perpetually open gate, and over the gate are written the words, 'Whosoever will may come.'

From one point of view that is what the Bible does for us—it tells us how a barred gate became an open door, how man, driven out of the garden, finds his way into the City of God. What lies between the barred gate of Genesis and the ever-open door of Revelation? The life, work, and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is because of what He has done that the last word is not Paradise Lost but Paradise Regained.

1. *The Barred Gate*.—The account of the 'closed gate' comes at the end of the story of how sin entered the world. Adam rebelled against the declared will of God. He followed the devices and desires of his own heart instead of obeying the command of God. He hankered after the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, of which God had said, 'Thou shalt not eat of it.' Once he had done the deed and preferred his own will to God's the happy fellowship between himself and God at once came to an end—he went and hid himself from the presence of the Lord. The Garden of Innocence, too, became an impossible home for him. He was driven out and the cherubim were set to guard the gate and to prevent any return.

This is the way in which sin came into the world—man set up his own will against the will of his Maker. And this is always and everywhere the result and consequence of sin—exclusion from the Garden of Innocence and separation between ourselves and God. Anything may be our 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil.' Anything, the simplest thing, may quicken within us the knowledge of the difference between right and wrong. A child eats of the fruit of this tree when he does something which his parents forbid. His conscience condemns him. He becomes aware that he has done *wrong*. This does not mean that the actual committal of wrong is the only way we learn the difference between good and evil. As a matter of fact, no one was so keenly sensitive to the difference between good and evil as our Lord, who did no sin. Nevertheless, in the case of the rest of us, we learn the difference by actually experiencing in our own hearts and lives the consequences of wrong. For the same consequences happen still—separation between our-

selves and God, and exclusion from the Garden of Innocence.

¶ In the view of Jesus the most tragic result of sin is that it breaks the relationship between man and God. God does not turn us out of His home and slam the door upon us. The door is always open and He is always waiting to welcome us back. I have just been reading *Dr Bradley Remembers*. When the doctor's son takes to a dissipated life in North Bromwich the old relationship with his father is destroyed. The home is always open to him and his father would do anything to get him out of a scrape, bearing the sacrifice and shame himself. But the boy will not go home to meet his father; he cannot face him.<sup>1</sup>

2. *The Open Door*.—The fact of the barred gate everyone is conscious of—but the 'open door' is believable only to those who know that Jesus holds the key. And there lies the vast and measureless difference between all other literature and the Bible. Other books emphasize the fact of loss—the Bible goes on to speak of recovery. Other books insist upon the fact of sin—the Bible goes on to speak of salvation. Ibsen's gloomy dramas are full of the sense of tragedy and loss. No one has preached more sternly the truth, 'All for sin cannot atone'; but the Bible goes on to add, 'Thou must save and Thou alone.' The Bible is the most bracing, cheering, optimistic book in the world. Its message to the world is the message of recovery, restoration, redemption, salvation. It begins with the 'barred gate'; but it doesn't, like Ibsen and Hardy, end there; it ends with the 'open door.'

It is quite true that the 'open door' of Revelation does not lead back again to the Garden of Genesis. But the 'open door' admits to something better—it admits to the City of God. The Garden stands for solitude; the City stands for fellowship. Life in the City is fuller and richer than life in the Garden. And God is there—even more really than in the Garden, 'The glory of the Lord doth lighten it.' Or, to leave figure and symbol behind, Christ does not admit us back to our lost innocence, but He admits us to a purified character. He does not restore to us our unstained childhood, but He leads us into a regenerated manhood.

¶ There was a hospital in France where men

<sup>1</sup> L. J. Tizard, *Facing Life with Confidence*, 81.

whose features had been shattered by the devilries of war were sheltered from the common gaze. They could not see themselves, for all mirrors and bright metals were taken away—yet they knew. All they desired was death to free them from their hideous exile. No longer could they think of home or loved ones in their misery. There came to them a great surgeon. He was a man of another race, but, hour after hour, day after day, he worked, building up their broken features till at last they looked like men. I can still see the light which shone in their eyes when they knew they could look once more into the faces of those they loved without fear or shame. They had returned from the pit! The surgeon died. He gave himself for their healing, and they came back to life again.<sup>1</sup>

3. *The Temper of the World and the Spirit of Christ*.—The contrast between the barred gate and the ever-open door sets forth the difference between the temper of the world and the Spirit of Jesus. The world, from one point of view, is very harsh and unforgiving and merciless. Its ethical standards admittedly are not high and often they are very arbitrary. So long as men get no stigma of disgrace against their names it pays respect and deference to them. In the sight of God these men may be sinners far above those whom the world casts out, but because they have incurred no public shame the world receives them and honours them. But towards men and women who have, as we say, 'lost their character,' the world shows itself very merciless and cruel. Take the man who has brought himself for some reason or other within the clutches of the law, the man who has had to serve a term of imprisonment. How hard the world is on such a man! The man who has sinned, and wants to win back his good name, finds himself faced on every hand by the 'barred gate.'

But where the world is pitiless Christ is merciful; and where the world is cruel Christ is kind. For the barred gate He substitutes the open door. There was a notorious thief in Jericho, by name Zacchæus. He was none the less a thief that he occupied an important official position. His position only enlarged his opportunity of thieving. And his thieving was of a particularly mean sort, because the favourite victims of his exactions were weak and friendless people. Society in Jericho cast Zacchæus out.

<sup>1</sup> L. F. Church, *If They Had Known*, 110.



It had no good word for him. It put him outside the pale. But when Jesus came to Jericho He invited Himself to Zacchæus' house. He saw the yearning after better things in the little man's soul. And so He spoke kindly to him and hopefully. He spoke of a return to honour and to the love of God. 'He also,' He said, 'is a son of Abraham.' For the barred gate of the world Christ set before Zacchæus an open door.

And this is typical of the way in which our Lord speaks and acts still. There are plenty of people for whom the world has nothing but a closed gate. It repels them; it frowns upon them; it casts them out. But our Lord gathers up 'the outcasts of Israel.' He speaks graciously and tenderly to the world's abjects and cast-aways. There is not one whom He regards as past saving. There is not one whose case He regards as hopeless. There is not one who has not a chance of recovery. Before everyone He sets the open door.

4. *The Failure of the World and the Power of Christ.*—The 'closed gate' and the 'open door' symbolize not only the difference between the temper of the world and the Spirit of Jesus; they suggest something deeper, to which the difference in spirit is largely due. They suggest the impotence of the world and the power of Jesus. The world casts out the drunkard and the harlot and the thief because it knows its own impotence to redeem them. All the world can do with sin and evil is to try, often by harsh measures, to check and restrain it and to stop it from spreading. It has not succeeded in making bad men good, and foul men clean, and greedy men generous. Miracles of that kind are beyond its power. So it has nothing for the fallen, the sinful, and the broken but a 'barred gate.' It is the sign and symbol of the world's impotence and failure.

But Jesus sets before men the 'open door' because He knows He has the power to re-create and restore. John Masefield's widely read poem, *The Everlasting Mercy*, is a story of the 'open door' Christ sets before men. Saul Kane was a hopeless member of the community, to which he was a perpetual scandal—an outrage, and a blot upon the good name of his town. What can be done with such a man? Is there any remedy which civilization possesses for such a social malady? The answer of Masefield is that there is a power in the grace of Christ to change

that life in a moment of wonder. So where, in its consciousness of its own impotence, the world sets a closed gate, the saving and redeeming Lord sets before every one an open door—an open door into the holy city and the very presence of God.

¶ Mr J. A. R. Cairns, the well-known London magistrate, records that on one occasion he told the story of a prisoner, who had been brought before him at Thames Police Court, to a doctor, and that the doctor's verdict was that the man was a hopeless case for whom nothing could be done.

"Is that the last word?" I asked. "Yes," replied the doctor, "that's the last word."

'Poor humanity! Once it had a gospel of hope and regeneration. The doctor smiled at me with a complacent indulgence.'

But Mr Cairns did not stop there. He knew too much of the divinity in human nature, the splendour that often breaks through the most sordid of lives, to be satisfied with cynicism. And quoting a case within his own knowledge, he went on: 'There lingers about the East End the story of a woman, whose strength and stately grace earned for her the nickname of the "Aldgate Hussar," and she was a woman of the street. She paid no heed to any law of God or man or health, and lived at the bottom of the world. She came one day to a turn on the road, and she was changed, literally transformed and transfigured. Whatever these experiences be, they are neither illusions nor delusions. Sodden men and fallen women, who stand the strain and stress of old defeats, who can gloriously triumph, have found something more than mottoes, litanies, or sacraments.'

## The Family Ideal of Society

Gen. iv. 9.—'Am I my brother's keeper?'

THAT question was first asked by a murderer, and he meant the answer to be 'No.' He disclaimed any responsibility for his brother. Christianity answers 'Yes' to the question. The fate of the world hangs upon its choice in this matter—whether it stands with Cain or with Jesus, whether it accepts or disclaims social responsibility. Cain's attitude leads inevitably to murder; not in most cases to direct murder on the part of the individual, but

to wholesale murder—to war, to commercial strife with its bitter fruits of unemployment and want, to oppression of the weak by the strong, to conditions of life that kill manhood and womanhood not with merciful swiftness but by slow poison. The way to fullness of life is through whole-hearted and universal acceptance of responsibility for one another's welfare.

1. The true ideal of society is the family. Family life is not always a chorus of harmony. Selfishness introduces discord and strife. But at its best the family is the finest product of civilization. The family rests on the natural foundation of blood relationship, but its peculiar beauty is due to a spiritual factor—to the mutual love that springs out of close kinship. If love is lacking the family may hold together, but it loses its peculiar charm and sacredness.

'God hath made of one blood all nations of men,' said St Paul. The world is really one big family, bound together by ties of blood kinship. In spite of all the things that divide us, humanity is a unity—one in its origin, one in its essence, one in its destiny. But without the bond of love that unity is not a spiritual reality.

The family idea of society has never been realized in history. Within small communities there has been an approach to it. The tribe is only a larger family. All the members of the tribe are brothers. But family feeling ceased at the tribal frontiers. The outsider was an alien, and probably an enemy. He had no claim whatever on the protection and hospitality of the tribe.

With the growth of civilization, and largely under the influence of Christianity, the family spirit has found some expression in the community. The poor have been cared for, hospitals have been built for the sick and asylums of various kinds for the unfortunate. These are all approaches to the family ideal, but they come far short of realizing it. In spite of all its ameliorations life is still a scramble in which the few get much and the vast majority little. The equality, the spirit of sharing, which mark the family are only dimly realized in social life to-day.

Towards those outside the nation the old tribal feeling, slightly modified, still persists. The foreigner is an alien, and a potential enemy.

Bruno, the great Italian philosopher, paid a visit to England in the days of Queen Elizabeth; and he tells that it was positively dangerous then for a foreigner to show himself in the streets of London without adequate protection. The cry would be raised, 'A foreigner!' and he would soon be surrounded by a mob of apprentices who would push him into the gutter and pelt him with filth, and he might count himself lucky if he escaped serious injury. We no longer show our patriotism in such rough and barbarous ways, except when there is actual war. Then we revert to the old tribal barbarism. A thousand forces in our modern life have broken down national barriers, and created world unity of a kind. But it is not the unity of a family. There is no real internationalism. Tariff-walls, huge armaments, offensive and defensive alliances—these are the outstanding facts of the modern world. Even here, in the land where freedom has its home and Christian ideals are a real force, we are still predominantly national in outlook; and still more is that true of Germany and Italy and Japan. The world at large is far from accepting the family ideal of society.

¶Breathes there a man with soul so dead that it does not glow at the thought of what the men of his blood have done and suffered to make his country what it is? There is room, plenty of room, for proper pride of land and birth. What I inveigh against is a crusted spirit of intolerance, conceived in distrust and bred in ignorance, that makes the mental attitude perennially antagonistic, even bitterly antagonistic, to everything foreign, that subordinates everywhere the race to the nation, forgetting the higher claims of human brotherhood.<sup>1</sup>

2. Jesus is our guide in this matter. Except in the Fourth Gospel, which mirrors the view of a later generation of Christians, there is little in the teaching of Jesus that explicitly indicates a world-outlook. He was a Jew. He lived and moved in a somewhat narrow world. But the wider view is implicit in all His teaching. Love, He says, is the true bond of all human relationships. In the story of the Good Samaritan He attacks national narrowness at its strongest point, and asserts that the neighbourly spirit knows no limits of race or class.

Jesus made little of blood relationship. He

<sup>1</sup> Sir William Osler.



based His social doctrine of brotherhood on the spiritual fact of Divine sonship. God is the Father of all men, and thus, because of that, all men are brothers. His ultimate social ideal, expressed in the phrase, 'the Kingdom of God,' is a world-wide human family. It is true that the phrase is political rather than domestic—a kingdom, not a family. But Jesus did not coin the phrase. He found it ready made, and borrowed it to pour into it His own meaning. God is King. All life must be under His control, and there can be no salvation on any other terms. But God is also Father. His citizens are also His children. And so the Kingdom is a community of brothers—a big family.

3. If we accept the family ideal of society what personal obligations does it lay on us?

Cain's question was sarcastic. 'Am I my brother's keeper? Am I responsible for his safety and his actions?' The word 'keeper' suggests a warder in a prison or an asylum—one who has charge of another. If the question is asked with that meaning then the answer is emphatically 'No.' You are not your brother's keeper in any sense which implies that his personal rights or his personal responsibility can be taken over by you. Even kindly intention does not justify interference with other people's private affairs.

¶ Virginia Woolf, in a book which she entitled *A Room of One's Own*, made an eloquent plea for an element of privacy in the life of a woman. Her personality is sometimes submerged in the family, and it ought not to be. Every member of the family has an inner life—a private room—which not even the nearest and dearest ought to invade.

Nevertheless the family ideal does bring its obligations. There is, first of all, the world of personal contacts, which is a very tiny world. It consists of our friends and acquaintances, the people we rub up against regularly in work or in play or in worship, and the people we meet casually. In that little world of personal contacts we must act decently. These people are all our brothers, whoever they may be and in whatever way we come into touch with them. They are entitled to courtesy and friendliness, and to help if they are in need, and we can give it.

¶ Once when the saintly father of Bardsley Brash was staying at the seaside his son remon-

strated with him for speaking to so many people, for his warm nature refused to think of the town as other than one great family romping and seeking health together. 'I should not speak to so many people whom you don't know,' said the son, 'they will not like it.' He might as well have talked to the wind! 'I'm sure they will,' the old man replied gaily, 'it's all your cursed English pride. God meant the world to be a family and it would be so if we were always friendly to all.'<sup>1</sup>

And what of the vast world with which we cannot possibly have personal contact? What of the millions in our own land whom we never meet? Our nearest obligation is to our fellow-countrymen—those who speak our language, who share our history, our traditions, our institutions. Can we feel happy about the state of things in our own land—unemployment, widespread poverty, a rising drink bill, gambling among all classes, starved bodies and minds and souls? And all the sufferers from these evils are our brothers.

But our obligation overleaps the bounds of nationality. Evil everywhere is our foe. Unhappy conditions for any people ought to excite our pity. How does war look in the light of the family ideal? A situation may arise in which war may be the lesser of two evils, and it cannot be God's will that the greater evil should have its way. But certainly the obligation rests upon us all to try to remove the causes of war, to create peaceful machinery for the settlement of disputes between nations, to dissipate the poisonous gases of jealousy and fear that are choking the world to-day and make the air pure with mutual trust and appreciation of common interests.

'What can I do in such huge and complicated matters as these?' you may ask. 'I am only a unit. I count for so little.' That is true of us all, but our responsibility is not in regard to the much that we cannot do but to the little that we can do. We must avoid the mistake of the man who hid his one talent in the earth. We have votes. Do we use them prayerfully for high human ends as far as we are able? We can help in a small way to mould public opinion. We can support in some measure great movements which are making for freedom and justice and peace. And we can pray.

<sup>1</sup> *Love and Life*, 69.

'Am I my brother's keeper?' Yes; you are under obligation so to live that, through your actions and public spirit, the Christian ideal of society as a family is brought nearer to fulfilment.

*'Am I my brother's keeper?'*

Yes, of a truth!

Thine asking is thine answer.

That self-condemning cry of Cain

Has been the plea of every selfish soul since then,

Which hath its brothers slain.

God's word is plain,

And doth thy shrinking soul arraign.

*Thy brother's keeper?*

Yes, of a truth thou art!

For if not—who?

Are ye not both—both thou and he,

Of God's great family?

How rid thee of thy soul's responsibility?

For every ill in all the world

Each soul is sponsor and account must bear.<sup>1</sup>

## The Song of the Sword

Gen. iv. 24.—'If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold.'

1. IN this fourth chapter we are shown how the thoughts of mankind gradually widened and their horizon expanded. The writer does not seek to disguise the fact that 'it is to the self-reliant and God-defying energy of the descendants of Cain that we owe much of the external civilization of the world.' It is among them, for the most part, that we find the builders of cities, the founders of empires, the inventors of tools and weapons of war, music and poetry, and the advancement of culture. In a few expressive and memorable phrases we see the gradual growth of culture in the world—the beginnings of civilization, discovery, crafts, art and music, and warfare.

In one branch of Lamech's family portable tents of skin had been devised, and the heirs of this craft were henceforth free to move from place to place. Without this simple step towards adventure and freedom the conquest and colonization of after-days would have been

<sup>1</sup> John Oxenham.

impossible. In another branch of this family the first rude musical instruments were fashioned, and a new factor of power in the life of the future rose above the horizon. And in a third branch the uses of metals were discovered; and the race passed from the stone to the bronze and iron age. The descendants of Cain were clever though godless, and with each succeeding generation relied more implicitly upon their own skill and inventiveness, and less upon the goodwill and help of God. And it is in Lamech that this brilliant but godless civilization culminates.

2. Lamech is one of those people who live in a song; and it is highly characteristic that it is a 'Song of the Sword.' He is returning, we may suppose, from some deed of blood, and he boasts before his wives—as is still common to-day among the Bedouin—of what he has done. He expresses his sense of delight at the means which he now possesses, thanks to the ingenuity of his smith, of effectually avenging all bodily injuries. God has promised to grant Cain protection and sevenfold vengeance on any who should slay him. But Lamech's impious boast is that he needs no protection from God; he can defy his enemies himself, and defend himself with the weapons forged for him by Tubal-cain. He glories in the fact that he has requited a mere wound or bruise inflicted upon him, with the death of his adversary. The very names of Lamech's wives heighten the Rembrandtesque 'light' and 'shade' of this bold picture.

Adah and Zillah, hear my voice!

Wives of Lamech, attend to my word!

For I kill a man for a wound to me,

And a boy for a scar.

For Cain takes vengeance seven times,

But Lamech seventy times and seven!

¶ Alan Breck in *Kidnapped*, after he has made the deck of the *Covenant* to run with blood, sits down upon the table in the round-house, sword in hand, and breaks out into a kind of wild chant in which he celebrates his feats of slaughter—

This is the song of the sword of Alan:

The smith made it,

The fire set it;

Now it shines in the hand of Alan Breck.



The dramatic power of Lamech's sword-lay owes much of its weird intensity to the fact that the sword of Lamech flashes in the light of the fires of war of our own day. The first results of this godless civilization are to render warfare more horrible. The result of science without sanctification is—poison-gas. The consequence of worldly success without God is slaughter. This is the natural climax of the self-sufficiency to which all Cain's line have been tending. To what purpose has it been that the unregenerate children of men have, by their skill, sought out many inventions? What has the discovery of the useful and the fine arts done for them? What even has music, 'that daughter of heaven which has come down to earth,' availed to tame the naturally savage breast of man? Has it regenerated him? Have all these gifts made him a new creature? The readiness to shed blood, which had first been shown by Cain, appears in an intensified and more revolting form in Lamech. This, says the writer, is what comes of trying to enjoy the world without God—a boastful, bullying man, dangerous to society, the incarnation of the hateful pride of life. It is written for us once again at the beginning of the world's history, that separation from God leads to estrangement from man, and to cruelty which seeks only its own selfish glory.

¶ Sir Alfred Ewing—the distinguished civil engineer—in his 'James Forrest Lecture' describes in most moving terms how, as a young teacher, he had hoped that the march of discovery and invention would soften the heart of man. But the Great War proved to him the failure of applied mechanics to change the heart of man. Progress in science has far outstripped the ethical progress of the race. 'Surely it is for the engineer as much as any man to pray for a spiritual awakening, to strive after such a growth of sanity as will prevent the misuse of his gifts.'

3. Lamech was the singer of the first jingo song, the first to appeal to the crude arbitrament of war. For generations the descendants of Cain had been more or less disliked and ostracized, and, no doubt, they had to some extent retaliated upon their contemporaries. But the turn of fortune has come at last, and Lamech declares that he will be more than quits with those who have shown him coldness

and antipathy. The implacable anger of Cain is still smouldering within the tribe, and it is worthy of note that the descendants of the murderer are the first to fashion arms and to brandish them in the face of their brethren. Against this clan so wonderfully armed and equipped there can be no effectual reprisals, whatever may be the provocation they offer.

Is it such an ancient picture? Are we not only too familiar with the spectacle of a nation priding itself upon its inventions and upon the might of its armaments, and, as the outcome of it all, throwing off the thin veneer of a surface civilization, and making its arrogant clamour for war? It is the spirit of Lamech that has plunged the world into its present miseries, and that threatens, if it has its way, to overwhelm even civilization itself.

4. The lesson of Lamech is one that needs to be laid to heart by all who pride themselves upon their achievements or their accomplishments; that wealth and ability and culture and worldly success, divorced from God, are not a blessing, but a curse. There are many these days who speak and act as if mankind could be redeemed by opening Art Galleries and providing good popular concerts, by lighting the homes of the people with electricity and bringing the inventions of the age to their doors. It cannot be done. The Church is its own excuse for being. No one finds it necessary to explain the need for hospitals or to apologize for the presence of the school. We need places for the restoration of the soul, for the training of the spirit. Let us gladly recognize the place that music and all the fine arts have in the sweetening and brightening of life, but do not let us expect them to do what they can never do. When we plan for greater national prosperity and well-being let us never forget that 'righteousness alone exalteth a nation; and that people is great whose God is the Lord.'

## A Notable Beginning

Gen. iv. 26.—'He was the first to call upon Jehovah by name.'

GRANT DUFF in his *Diary* tells how once when he was tramping over the Italian hills he fell in with a shepherd who bore him company for a

while; and as they were stepping across a scanty hill stream the old man pointed to it with his staff, and said, 'This is what is called the Tiber down at Rome.' He was jealous for the honour of his mountain-side. He was conscious that this burn had not much to catch the eye—a stretch of bleached shingle, with a thin trickle of water among the stones; but that hill-burn grew to something of note, to a river of world-wide renown. And it is with the same reverent sense of future expansions that our author records this notable beginning in the story of the life of man. Enosh, it is declared, was the first to call upon Jehovah by name. Of the man himself he had nothing to relate: he had no information as to what he prayed for, or how he prospered in his petitions. But he felt that all that prayer has meant in the life of man—the intimacy, the potency, the victories of it—could be traced back to this obscure beginning. 'There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,' and its source lies here.

There are two things which impress one in the text: the author's estimate of the relative values of prayer and material advance, and a hint which he gives of the way in which prayer may become more effective.

1. Throughout the chapter the writer's imagination is held by the extraordinary interest of that legendary age, when, in many directions, things were being attempted for the first time. He tells of the significant passage over from hunting to shepherding, and of the discovery of the use of fire in working metals. He tells of what, for good and evil both, proved to be so prodigious an innovation—the building of the first town. These days before history were marked by many of the supreme victories of the human spirit; but the author, who had nothing but tradition and legend to go upon, was troubled by one consideration, that all these discoveries seemed to have come from the line of Cain, the rebel—from those who were against God. And then with superb deliberation, weighing value against value, he asserts on the other side that it was in the house of Seth that men first began to pray. If others were quicker and more ingenious in the arts, these, at least, led the way in religion.

If we are wise, we shall not attempt accurately to balance one of these achievements against the other, for they cannot be weighed in the

same scales. It would be a witless thing to compel men to choose between Seth and Cain, between religion and the wonders of science and art. Abana and Pharpar are God's rivers as much as Jordan, and God Himself must find pleasure in beautiful things since He is always making them, and scattering them where there is scarcely a chance of their being seen by mortal eyes. This is a marvellously interesting world, of infinite attractions. There are voices always calling in it—lessons to learn, heights to climb, joys to taste; but what if on one whole side of our being no progress is observed, and our growth is thus lop-sided?

¶ Goethe, who certainly was not a narrow pietist, in a letter exclaims, 'Let the world make progress as it will, let every branch of human investigation be pursued to its limit, but nothing can ever take the place of the Bible as the foundation of all culture and all education.'

Jubal came with his harp and fife, Tubalcain with his forge, cities rose and men were drilled in the habit of living together, which all are real achievements. But Enosh was the first to call upon Jehovah by name, and, if this element had been wanting and the progress were all in neglect of God, it would have been sinister and perhaps accursed. The earliest prayers, no doubt, were formless and rude, but only the unthinking would on that account deride them: 'this is what is called the Tiber down at Rome.' Prayer has meant so much in human life; it has worked for the clearing of sight and the reviving of courage. All round the world to-day men and women are by it strengthened for their duties, and their souls are bathed as in a renovating fountain, and Christ Himself is freely communicated to those who ask.

¶ In the quiet of home, in the heat of life and strife, in the face of death, the privilege of speech with God is inestimable. I value it more because it calls for nothing that the way-faring man, though a fool, cannot give—that is, the simplest expression to his simplest desire. When I can neither see, nor hear, nor speak, still I can pray so that God can hear. When I finally pass through the valley of the shadow of death, I expect to pass through it in conversation with Him.<sup>1</sup>

In the name which he gives to this son of

<sup>1</sup> Sir Wilfred Grenfell.



Seth the writer hints at a point of vital interest. He calls him Enosh, a word which simply means man, and, in particular, man in his frailty and mortality; and thus the paradox is suggested that what first led our far-off ancestors to seek a higher world was their sense of inadequacy for this lower one. If everything had gone smoothly, if sickness and fear and disaster had not assailed them, they might never have discovered their need of God, and thus they would have remained mere creatures of the earth. But through their conscious weakness they attained to the dignity of sons and friends of God. One of the great masters in theology has defined religion in its essence as 'the sense of utter dependence.' Whatever taught men how frail they are directly inclined them to reach out to Someone who hears and who can provide.

2. This man gives a hint as to how prayer may be amended and made effective. In characteristic fashion, Renan in one place admits that when everything was going well, or when the world seemed peculiarly enticing, he was inclined to look up and give thanks, only he never knew to whom to offer these. And this is where our author meets us, for Enosh was the first to call upon Jehovah *by name*. In his weakness and terror he directed his prayer not to some vague possibility of being, not even to what Matthew Arnold called 'a stream of tendency,' but to a Person, with a name. The name Jehovah seemed to mean 'He who will be,' and thus it is an embodied promise. It looked back to all that men had found Him to be, and forward to all that they yet might find. It is a name to awaken confidence. 'He that cometh to God,' says the writer to the Hebrews, 'must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him,' and certainly it is only to a God of ascertained character that we with confidence can pray. There have always been superior persons who, because they felt God to be greater than our human forms, have refused to make use of these. They withdraw from any communal worship, but it cannot be said that their views have exerted much power of infection. For it is a good beginning when a man is humble enough boldly to call upon the illimitable God *by name*.

As everyone knows, Jehovah was a tribal

designation for God, and thus it may incur the suspicion of being provincial. The true God ought to be the world's God and not the monopoly of some favoured folk. The prophets were in no way blind to this: 'Am I a God at hand and not also a God afar off?' we read in Jeremiah: 'surely I fill both heaven and earth.' And yet men first got hold of the vastness of God by catching at what was within their reach: whatever He might be more, at least He was God to them—their hope and stay, and He had shown that they were something to Him. And thus through their frank and confident use of the tribal name for God they arrived at that instinctiveness of appropriation, which is the life of religion. 'This God is our God,' they said. The very word Jehovah came in the course of generations to speak of a rich experience of patience and rebuke and healing, of appeals answered and deliverance secured. This and this and this again He has done for His people—a God who has never failed us in need; and thus their prayer grew bold through the teaching of the Name.

What poisons and paralyses the religion of many of us is its vagueness; a man may have a wealth of exalted opinions and yet never attain to any intimacy with God. This is where Jesus helps men, for He is the mystery and the majesty of God brought within our reach. He is 'God manifest in the flesh.' The whole life of Jesus was just God made apprehensible and near, and, through taking hold of what was simple, men and women became possessors of what was beyond all measures: 'through Jesus,' says Peter, 'ye became believers in God.' Apart from this way of simplicity and lowliness there is no other.

¶ 'It is best to begin below at Christ, and then we hear and we find the Father; but those who are ambitious and begin at the top have tumbled and broken their necks.'<sup>1</sup>

So this is our author's hint as to the amending of prayer. The first thing he reckoned needful is to break the paralysing silence, and to begin for ourselves to speak to God as One on whom we have a claim. As soon as this has been achieved strange secrets begin to establish themselves between God and His friend—inward confidences, uprisings of gladness and of hope, workings of power and illumination. So nothing more truly marks an epoch in the life of a man

<sup>1</sup> Luther.

than the day at which, through the use of a Name, he can for himself lay hold of God, and say, 'Thou art my God!' When the man Enosh entered upon this high road, there was inevitably much darkness and misapprehension remaining, but a start had been made. 'This is what is called the Tiber down at Rome'—not much, perhaps, to look at, and yet the glory of life gathers round this beginning.

## Walking with God

Gen. v. 24.—'And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.'

1. THIS chapter is an uninterrupted record of the generations from Adam to the Deluge. It is a monotonous chronicle of nobodies. One after another they deploy before us, a moment visible, then gone for ever. The only memorial they have left is that they were born and begat children and died. And it is in the midst of that long and dreary list, without one touch of human interest in it, that suddenly there comes this touch of music and colour: 'And Enoch walked with God.'

This is what they remembered about Enoch after he had passed from these scenes of time, not that he had been a fighting man and a stern champion of righteousness, nor that he had been the father of a phenomenally long-lived son—although fathers who live godfearing, clean lives, do tend to beget long-lived sons—but that he had the air of a man who moved in the most exalted society and had been dignified by a great Companionship.

¶ 'Tell me the secret of your life,' said Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Charles Kingsley; to which he replied, 'I had a friend.'

¶ A religious allegory tells of a villager who, wherever he went, was accompanied by an unseen friend. When he entered a room he stepped aside to let his invisible companion enter first. When he sat at table an extra place was set, and the choicest bits were put on the other plate. When he was dying there was a chair beside his bed, and some one invisible was sitting on it with whom he talked in whispers till he died.

2. When we look again at Enoch, we realize that his life of fellowship with God was far from

being an accident. It rested on the fulfilment of conditions: such lives invariably do. That elevation, that beauty of nature came by no special favour or external necessity, but in accordance with spiritual fact. And Christians who impress us as living in the presence of the King, and thereby take on a radiance and power we wonder at, have all, as may be learnt from their self-revelation, complied with rules of the highest life.

(1) To begin with, they have sought and found *reconciliation*. They have come to be agreed with God about His holiness and their own sin, for how can two walk together unless *there* they are agreed? No man can get far in the Christian life without consenting that God should tell him the truth about himself, and without the discovery bringing him to his knees in penitence. No man can give the gospel its full chance with him, except as he learns to say, and to mean what he is saying: 'God, be merciful to me a sinner.' To say that with our face towards Jesus Christ is to be reconciled. It means that we let Him forgive us freely, and that the unbought love of His pardon touches and thrills the deep chords of gratitude. That is reconciliation, and only the reconciled man can walk with God. He keeps both his consciousness of sin and his thankfulness for Christ fresh and keen all his days.

¶ In a Scottish story, *The New Road*, the traveller says to one who offers him companionship, 'If you're going along with me, you'll need to be as open as the day'; and that is the rule for all who would 'walk with God.'

(2) Again, men walk with God in the way of *duty*. Always you can distinguish religion from what is called religiosity by the presence of this vital factor. One thinks of Enoch not as wrapped in selfish contemplation, or as never quite awake to the feelings and sufferings of other people, or considering their affairs an unwelcome intrusion. The blessed Angela of Foligno in the Middle Ages, we are told, was rather glad to be relieved of her husband and children, who died and left her at leisure to enjoy the love of God. If God is like Jesus, that is not how He would have us walk with Him. We serve Him in discharging our duty.

¶ Robertson of Irvine, at a meeting of Presbytery, was once asked who the speaker was who had just sat down, after a particularly



noble speech. 'He is an elder of mine,' he said, 'who lives in communion with God and makes shoes.'

(3) Men walk with God by *faith*. That was the characteristic upon which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews put his finger as being the secret of Enoch's life. Why does the Bible touch this note so constantly? Why is every circumference of blessing and appeal drawn from this centre? Because faith is anything by itself? No, rather its object is everything. It is the metal pipe that carries the pure water. It is the open door that lets in God. Faith rises high and strong because of Him upon whom it lays hold. Faith sees the God with whom we are to walk; faith feels for the hand that has touched, and waked, and roused us; faith hears the Father's invitation to walk with Him, and believes that it can be done through His love, and perseveres in loyalty even when His face is hid. All is explained by faith, and by faith all is guided and inspired.

3. Again, Enoch walked with God in very evil times. Do we complain that it is hard to do right in the twentieth century; that it is difficult to believe in a God of love when wars are raging? What if we had lived in the days of Enoch? Things were not made easy for him. And yet with everything to oppose him, often left in darkness, often thrown off the track, often listening for God's voice but unable to hear it, amidst pride and godlessness, notwithstanding scorn and violence and ridicule, he walked with God.

And yet, had we questioned Enoch, it is doubtful whether he would have felt the difficulty. He would have said: I have God, and in comparison with Him nothing matters. It is true, revelation had not gone far by that time; but we cannot forget that very little religious knowledge will carry a man on in perfect comfort, if God is his. Think of the last glimpse we get of the Ethiopian eunuch, as he climbed back into his chariot and whirled off across the desert. 'He went on his way rejoicing,' the story ends. And at once we ask, what was there to rejoice about? He was going back to a savage land, to martyrdom very likely, the only Christian in the country, with a few scattered leaves of the Old Testament and what he could recall of Philip's words. Yes; but he now had Christ in his heart;

he had the great Divine Friend with whom henceforward he could walk. Let us too have that certainty of personal possession, better still of being possessed, and encircling difficulties will shrink and fade.

¶ Joseph Conrad, in an essay quotes from a letter of Sir Robert Stopford. Stopford was one of Nelson's men. He was commander of one of the ships with which Nelson chased to the West Indies a fleet nearly double in number. And describing the experiences and hardships of that desperate adventure, Stopford wrote the words: 'We are half starved, and otherwise inconvenienced by being so long out of port. But our reward is—we are with Nelson!'<sup>1</sup>

4. 'By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him.' 'God took him,' says this writer, 'God took him—not nature, or disease, or death, but He with whom he had walked.' Whatever be the experience covered by these words, its counterpart will be found in the lot of every good man, for whom the passing forward is not a lonely voyage out into the dark, but God's calling him hence, God's fetching him home.

¶ General William Booth lies buried in Abney Park Cemetery and on his grave are inscribed the words: 'William Booth, born . . . ascended . . .'

'Enoch walked with God.' The words tell of a life lived long before Christianity was heard of, and we cannot listen to them without questioning whether anything similar could be said of ourselves. Is there anything in us or about us that claims affinity with this career, and that, with conviction though it may be fitfully, is forging on to such a climax? 'God and Death,' it has been said, 'are the two greatest ideas of which the human mind is capable'; and we have not gained possession of ourselves or of all that makes our being blessed or secure until we have come to terms with both. What death shall mean for us is fixed by all that God means—His unsleeping love, His constraining holiness, His faithfulness to every word of promise, His patience with each faint endeavour after good. Let any man walk with God, and at the last God will take him, as in the day of grace He took Jesus, our Brother in death, our Redeemer from death's

<sup>1</sup> J. S. Stewart, *The Gates of New Life*, 149.

sting, and set Him at His own right hand in heavenly places.

Gently translated, they  
 Pass out of sight,  
 Gone as the morning stars  
 Flee with the night:  
 Taken to endless day,  
 So may I fade away  
 Into Thy light.

### The Story of Ararat

Gen. viii. 4.—‘ And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat.’

ARARAT is the first great height upon which the feet of men are set in Biblical story. On its high vantage-ground the human race obtained a second chance.

But there would be no mountains if there were no depressions, and the story of Ararat begins in the depressions. The interest of the whole narrative is moral rather than physical. On the physical side, however, two things have to be said. The first is the general acceptance of the fact of the Flood in the history of the world. That some great inundation took place is established in the tradition of the race, and in the scientific researches of the world. The second thing is that only the inhabited world was affected. It was not the world that was judged, but mankind.

1. *Ararat witnessed the desolations of judgment.* The Flood was not regarded as a mere accident, the upheaval of blind irresponsible forces. It was believed to be the act of God consequent upon certain conditions of life. It was a Divine effort to counteract the evil that threatened to overrun the earth. For long years the Divine purpose pleaded with men and protested against their follies and wicked devices, but there was no response. The men of Noah's generation made light of his counsel, and treated his predictions of judgment as the jest of a dreamer. It is often given to a man to see the course events are taking, and to perceive the inevitable consequence if these things are persisted in. The vision will not keep silent. He must speak

out his heart. Thus Noah became a preacher of righteousness.

It is as plain as history can make it that when evil persisted in becomes an offence to God and a peril to the moral well-being of the world, something occurs to check and restrain it. If the Flood had been caused by blind forces of Nature and Noah had cleverly contrived his escape as the result of his own premonitions and self-invented precautions, the event would never have produced an altar and a sacrifice. It would not have issued in worship and a vow. His altar was no superstitious tribute to fate for having contrived his escape from disaster. He was not thanking ‘ whatever gods there be ’ for the good fortune of his survival. To the one man who survived the deluge and who knew all the events that preceded it, the Flood was a deliberate judgment upon moral corruption.

The narrative goes direct to the first great cause whom men call God. He is the silent witness of all that is done upon the earth. ‘ And God saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth.’ It is not only the outward and public acts of life that are witnessed, but the inward condition of which the outward is the natural and inevitable expression. ‘ God saw that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was evil.’ His knowledge penetrates to our heart's deepest core.

¶ ‘ You should have kept your secret better,’ said someone to Barnaby Rudge, whose sin had caught and caged him at last. ‘ My secret! I had no secret. The stars had it in their twinkling, the leaves in their rustling, and the wind in its sighing. Every shadow in the street spoke of it to me.’

It was remarked of an artist that she excelled in painting the ‘ averted face.’ The full front view was never given so that you could look into the white of the eyes or bring yourself within the gaze of the face on the canvas. The mind was detached. There was always something else that engaged its interest. We have days in our experience when God's face seems to be averted. The world that is torn with strife and outraged and tormented is not the object of His concern. His inaction puzzles us. He is not looking our way. So in our poor mood we feel. But in the fullness of time we discover that through those dark and troubled years God was the silent witness of all that was done on the earth. And not the silent witness only,



but also the sure worker for the judgment of wickedness and the redress of wrong.

There is a moral order in this world, and those who dash themselves against it will be broken in pieces. No man or nation can do wrong with impunity. There is nothing more certain in this world than this—that a man's sins will find him out. And so will the sins of a nation. God made this world for righteousness, and though wickedness has broken across its frontier and corrupted its life with violence and vice, righteousness shall yet recover its dominion, and evil shall be cleansed from the hearts of men.

¶ Emerson, summing up the character of Napoleon, says: 'He did all that in him lay to live and thrive without moral principle. It was the nature of things, the eternal law of man and of the world which balked and ruined him; and the result, in a million experiments, will be the same. Every experiment, by multitude or by individuals, that has a sensual and selfish aim, will fail.'

2. *The altar on Ararat celebrated the preservations of mercy.* It is the aspect of judgment that arrests and absorbs our mind at Ararat. We are inclined to miss the mercy, which is the bigger element, after all. Where judgment abounds, mercy much more abounds. There was the long-suffering patience that entreated the people for many years. But there are tragic elements of obstinacy in human nature. Men love to indulge their own inclinations. They trust their own instincts. They rely upon their own good sense, and regard any interruption of their habits of life as an unwarranted interference and an unpardonable impertinence. Noah's generation did not take him seriously. They thought he was too pessimistic; they believed that their own optimism would avert any unfavourable happening. When it was too late they found that he was right and they were wrong.

Another preacher of righteousness described himself as a 'voice crying in the wilderness.' It was not the function of the preacher he was defining. It was the hearing accorded by the world to the preaching of righteousness that he was describing. It was the reception given to mercy that he deplored. And never until mercy has done its utmost does judgment fall. Mercy is represented with a spade delving at the root of the fruitless tree to prolong its life and induce

its fertility. Only when that has irrevocably failed does judgment, with its sure and swift axe, take the cumberer away. He who searcheth the secrets of the heart can alone tell when mercy's last chance is foiled.

And when judgment does break forth, mercy will protect its own. It has pledged itself for the preservation of all goodness. By the devices of mercy Noah and his family were gathered out of the devastating flood. He found grace in the sight of the Lord. He had certain qualities of heart and life that distinguished him from other men. The choice of Noah was not capricious and arbitrary. His selection is justified by certain distinguishing and decisive features of character. Noah may have stumbled in the subsequent years of his life, but during the period of the world's trial he was the best man God could find for the purpose of giving the human race a fresh start. Coleridge was so critical of other men's productions that the complaint was urged against him, 'He wants better bread than can be made with wheat.' God did not seek a perfect man. He sought a man who desired righteousness and pursued it, and him God set apart for His high purpose.

The ark of safety was a provision of Divine mercy for the preservation of those that feared God and sought after righteousness. The ark itself was an eloquent and substantial appeal to men. To some it was an offence; to others it was foolishness; to Noah it was the power and the wisdom of God. Such also has been the cross of Christ to the later generations of the world. It is the revelation of the Divine attitude towards human sin: an attitude of uncompromising judgment. It is the appeal of God to the human conscience to accept the Divine estimate and to turn to the pursuit of holiness. It is the provision of mercy for the preservation of righteousness.

3. *The mount of mercy registered a covenant of devotion.* God had shut the door, and Noah waited until God opened it, and the word came 'go forth out of the ark.' God is never before His time and is never behind. The character of man is revealed by his reactions to experience. Noah vindicates God Himself by the thing he does. His first act, after the ark found rest and his family and possessions were set on the firm earth, was to build an altar and offer a sacrifice consecrating themselves to God. It was the

high act of the Pilgrim Fathers when they beached their boats at Plymouth Sound. It was the birth-hour of a nation, as Noah's act was the birth-hour of a race.

That one act reveals the character of Noah, and vindicates the choice of God. A more appropriate beginning could not be imagined. It set the example for all earthly celebration. Every experience of life finds its fittest memorial in an altar. We do not now build altars as in ancient times, because the Cross is the one altar of redeemed life for all time, but after every fresh redemption we should return to the Cross to begin life as in a new world with a fresh consecration. We should take frequent occasion to renew our vow so that it may retain its authority in our life.

¶ 'There I anointed the pillar,' said Thomas Boston of a hallowed spot in his garden after deliverance from family affliction, 'and there I vowed the vow.'

## The Rainbow through the Rain

Gen. ix. 13.—'I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.'

1. A THOUGHT of mercy, an emotion of hope was induced—perhaps everywhere, and certainly among the old Israelites—by the rainbow in the midst of storm. The contrast of its delicate brightness with the black fury of cloud behind it, and its opportune arrival just as the storm breaks up, seemed like a signal of hope and a promise of the merciful beneficence that dwelt in the heavens despite all tempest. That radiant arch filled men with delight and admiration even in the midst of all the discomfort and peril of savage weather. It restored their spirits, as daybreak does to a sleepless sufferer, or to shipwrecked outcasts upon the sea. Any one can be cheerful with the return of light; but here was not light only, but colour most gorgeous and most tender, woven by super-human wizardry, and curved with exquisite grace and vast breadth of power from horizon to horizon. A world with so stupendously beautiful an object in it might surely be trusted—an object born out of the very bosom of the storm itself. What could it indicate, this triumph of magical light over grim darkness, save the merciful goodwill of the Eternal

Power? 'When I bring a cloud over the earth, my bow shall be seen in the cloud; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.' Thus it seemed to their hearts that God spake.

And even we sophisticated people of to-day must, surely, be similarly touched if we let our imaginations dwell for a little on this marvel of the rainbow. When science has done all it can to explain its origin, the thing still remains as surprising as any magic and lovelier than any deliberate art. It is next to impossible to look at its radiant grace and not incline to believe it the work of a Mind that is careful for beauty; no wild and savage power bent upon destruction, but a calm and dexterous power bent upon construction, determined to draw forward and exalt our human spirits by flashes of unearthly beauty. Keats, in his *Lamia*, complains that rationalistic philosophy dispels the sense of the supernatural:

There was an awful rainbow once in heaven :  
We know her woof, her texture ; she is given  
In the dull catalogue of common things.  
Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,  
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,  
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine—  
Unweave a rainbow.

But such is not the deepest philosophy. You may explain the whole process of the refraction of light, the prismatic action of the falling raindrops, and the geometrical laws that govern the shape of the bow; but still the heart replies: 'from worlds not quickened by the sun a portion of the gift is won.' For this thing has communications to make with the emotions as well as with the analysing intellect. We are as sure that joy and confidence flow from it as that certain laws of physics govern its appearing. It reveals a world of spiritual values as certainly as the spectroscope discovers new substances or the telescope new stars. It is what it looks to be—a bridge between heaven and earth.

Let us have courage to trust this world, then—a world flashing with rainbows amidst its clouds and glooms, physical and spiritual wonders standing out of the most black and bitter circumstances to dazzle us with revelation of the grace enshrined at the heart of things. Let the magic rainbow be to us, as to old Israel, a symbol of God's covenant with



humanity. This brilliant ethereal creature born of the marriage of light and water; this fairy tapestry hung in heaven; this sudden elusive apparition which our hearts leap to behold, is a sign from the Almighty, a promise of the ultimate beatitude of life.

¶ 'I used to feel at this season of the year a sense of waste because I could not enjoy at once all that was spread abroad; till one day the overwhelming egotism of looking at it from this limited human point of view occurred to me, and I thought that God might be contemplating it all. Then I ceased to be oppressed by the sense of waste. The beauty of the season makes the contrast of man-made war more horrible and poignant; on the other hand it gives comfort and support. The sight of all this beauty and the feeling of response to it in oneself gives assurance that God rules in the Universe, and that evil cannot prevail. It is the same feeling expressed in the Bible and attributed to Noah when he saw the rainbow after the floods.<sup>1</sup>

2. But the rainbow in the cloud suggests more than the sacramental nature of the world in which we live. It is suggestive of God's mercy and care even in the dark experiences of life.

(1) *The rainbow in the cloud of sin and guilt.*—Without entering upon any critical questions in connexion with the story of the Deluge, it is enough that Scripture represents it as God's doom upon monstrous wickedness and sin. The story of the Deluge, in a word, preaches those two stern and solemn truths that are woven into the very fabric of Scripture—that the human race is a sinful race, and that the wages of sin is death.

Now that dark and gloomy and threatening cloud of sin is still in our sky—a cloud full of lightnings and thunders and bodeful of storm and tempest. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. We are all of us shut up under the law of sin and death. But, thank God, we can see His bow in the cloud! The rainbow in the physical world results from the shining of the sun upon the dark rain-cloud. And so to-day the sunshine of God's great love falling upon the black cloud of human sin, creates the rainbow of mercy.

'Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver

<sup>1</sup> G. M. Trevelyan, *Grey of Fallodon*, 342.

me from the body of this death?'—that is the cloud; 'Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord'—that is the rainbow. 'I am carnal, sold under sin'—that is the cloud; 'The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin'—that is the rainbow! What God did in the wealth of His love in view of human sin was to give His only-begotten Son, and as the result of what Jesus did on the Cross mercy is made possible for every sinner. Christ crucified is the rainbow. He is God's pledge of mercy to a guilty world.

¶ Seneca, who was near the Kingdom, confessed the weakness of his Stoicism, and pleaded with a pathetic cry, 'None of us has strength to rise, and O that some one would stretch out a hand!' Some One has stretched out a hand, declining to remain apart from us, assuming our nature that He might exhaust our curse and free us from our death.

There are two noticeable features of the rainbow: First of all, it seems to unite heaven and earth. Its ends are on the earth, its arch is in the sky. And so Jesus Christ, God's rainbow, has united God and man together. He has bridged the gulf that separated them. And, secondly, the rainbow seems to embrace the world. Between its arms it gathers all the earth that we can see. And in this it is but a type of the all-embracing love of Christ and mercy of God. 'There's a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea.'

(2) *The rainbow in sorrow.*—Sorrow comes to all of us in turn. But if we look, there is always a bow in it. Samuel Rutherford was transported from his beloved Anwoth into exile in Aberdeen. It was a heavy trial. But this is how he wrote to the parishioners from whom he had been snatched: 'Why should I draw back when God driveth His furrow through my soul? He purposeth a crop.' He had seen the rainbow. Here it is: 'Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.'

Here is another man into whose sky the dark and heavy clouds of sore temptation have sailed. He finds himself in some Pergamum or other where Satan's throne is. It is a ceaseless and grim fight with him from day to day, for honour and life. But even in that cloud we see God's bow. Here it is: 'God will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation open up a

way of escape'; and again this, 'I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation which cometh upon all the earth to try them that dwell therein.' Whatever the cloud, there is always the bow in the shape of this blessed and beautiful assurance, 'All things work together for good to them that love God.'

(3) *The rainbow in judgment.*—'We shall all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ,' says Paul, 'that each one may receive the thing done in the body according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad.' 'According to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad'—the words strike fear to our soul. For we have all of us done things we ought not to have done, and left undone things we ought to have done.

But Paul's picture is not quite complete. We turn to the Book of Revelation for the completion of the picture. The writer, by the touch he adds, gives us boldness in the day of judgment. Here it is: 'And there was a rainbow round about the throne.' The great White Throne does not stand for truth merely; in it mercy and truth are met together: it does not stand for bare and sheer righteousness merely; in it righteousness and peace have kissed each other. There is a rainbow round about the throne. Our Judge will prove a merciful Saviour. He will 'blot out, as a thick cloud, our transgressions and, as a cloud, our sins,' and, remembering only our feeble love for Himself, our feeble efforts at goodness, our poor and unworthy attempts at service, He will say, 'Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'

My God! how wonderful Thou art,  
Thy Majesty how bright,  
How beautiful Thy Mercy-Seat  
In depths of burning light!

Oh how I fear Thee, living God!  
With deepest, tenderest fears,  
And worship Thee with trembling hope,  
And penitential tears.

Yet I may love Thee too, O Lord!  
Almighty as Thou art,  
For Thou hast stooped to ask of me  
The love of my poor heart.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faber.

The rainbow in the cloud—have we seen it? There is only one way to see it, and that is to see God in Christ. He is God's 'bow' to the world—God's pledge and promise of mercy and love to the world.

## Babel and its Antidote

Gen. xi. 4.—'And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.'

ACCORDING to the story of Babel, in early days the whole race spoke one language. As they journeyed they came to the plains of Shinar, or Babylonia, and settled there. They built themselves a city of bricks, and then set to work to construct a tower which should reach to heaven. Their object was to make a name for themselves and to set up a landmark which should prevent the citizens from losing their way in the surrounding plains, and so from being scattered over the face of the earth. The story seems to represent God as fearing that, when the tower reached the sky, men would climb it and take heaven by storm. So He determined to defeat their plans. He went down and confounded their language, and scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

¶ 'The commentators are probably right,' says Frazer,<sup>1</sup> 'in tracing the origin of the story to the deep impression produced by the great city on the simple minds of Semitic nomads, who, fresh from the solitude and silence of the desert, were bewildered by the hubbub of the streets and bazaars, dazzled by the shifting kaleidoscope of colour in the bustling crowd, stunned by the din of voices jabbering in strange unknown tongues, and overawed by the height of the buildings, above all by the prodigious altitude of the temples, towering up, terrace upon terrace, till their glistening tops of enamelled brick seemed to touch the blue sky. No wonder that dwellers in tents should imagine, that they who scaled the pinnacle of such a stupendous pile by the long winding ramp, and appeared at last like moving specks on the summit, must indeed be near the gods.'

1. The ancient writers seized upon the fact of diversity of language as evidence of the curse

<sup>1</sup> *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament*, i. 365.



of God upon pride, because such diversity was a natural symbol of social disruption. It is probably true that very many races of men had their earliest homes in or about Mesopotamia. That country was, perhaps, the chief cradle of the human race, the centre from which the great dispersions of mankind began. But the confusion of tongues did not precede the dispersion; it followed upon it in the slow course of years. The story of the confusion of tongues is, therefore, not true historically. But it is very true as allegory. We know to our cost that folk who speak the same language can be thorough aliens to one another. Yet in the deepest sense a common language does indicate a certain fundamental community of soul. Hence the arrogance that destroys society is well represented as being the destroyer of common speech: it breaks down the means of communication between heart and heart. And that is the cardinal sin—insolent presumption and self-will destroying human communion and creating a mad muddle of discord in place of it. Whether it exhibit itself as civil tyranny, or as religious intolerance, or as individual lust and greed, this arrogant self-will is the disruptive element in society.

Undeterred by the experience of the race, unmoved by the ruins of former civilizations, men have continued to build their corporate lives on exactly the same principles as those which have proved so disastrous hitherto. When we inquire into the causes of the decay of empires, we are met with various facile explanations, all of which take heed only of the outward circumstances of the collapse. But when we reach the core of things, we discover in every case that the old Babylonian arrogance, pride, and self-sufficiency are repeated, and these eat like acid into the soul of a people until the inevitable collapse comes. It has been common enough to emphasize the division between politics and morality, either in words or in deeds. Some even are bold enough to say that so long as men are loyal to the State, serve and worship it, it matters little or nothing what is their religious faith or private morality. Entire nations have accepted this false division in life. The impressive Tower is the thing that matters. So long as they can build that dominating monument, increase their power, strengthen themselves against their neighbours, make the State compact and secure, what matters religion or morality? We can hear again the raucous voice

of the new Nebuchadrezzars shouting out 'This is great Babylon that I have built.' There is even a new fiery furnace into which all who will not bow the knee are thrown. The epoch which began with the French Revolution and had for its watchword the brave slogan, 'Liberty, equality and fraternity,' is reaching its climax in a series of States where such words no longer have meaning, and where men are shouting at each other in languages they cannot understand. The Lord, once again, has confounded their tongues, which in plain English means that pride and self-sufficiency have rendered normal human relations impossible. When a people imagine themselves to be self-contained, believing that man is all, and build for their own name alone, then know, the book of history being witness, that the end is not far away.

Our towns are copied fragments from our breast:

And all man's Babylons strive but to impart  
The grandeurs of his Babylonian heart.

¶ 'What are all our histories,' cries Cromwell, 'what are all our histories but God manifesting Himself—that He hath shaken, and tumbled down, and stamped upon everything He hath not planted.'

2. But we have an antidote to Babel. Just as in the ancient legend the devil's spirit of arrogance in man had brought disintegration, confusion and social ruin, so in the story of Pentecost the Divine spirit of love and humility in man brings understanding, communion and vital peace. In the pomp of Babel men's mouths were filled with alien tongues; in the meekness of Pentecost the alien tongues become a common language understood by all. And in place of warring races with contradictory aims we have the beginning of the Holy Catholic Church—that universal brotherhood built upon one loyalty, one faith, one baptism, deriving from, and living in, and moving to the one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all.

Age after age—and so appallingly in this our own day—we see the resurgence of aggressive arrogance, always bringing in its wake some intolerable distress. Military dictatorships plunge the world into war. The sacred rights of small nations are trampled under foot. International

treaties are not worth the paper they are written on. We out-babel Babel. But, amid all the satanic clamour of presumptuous selfishness against God's commonwealth, we turn our memories to Pentecost, where a real historic event took place, a beginning of incalculable moment, which must and shall find its fulfilment in the complete transformation of the world; and we still pin our faith and hope to that universal fellowship which God's Spirit is urgent to bring to pass on earth. Just as in those early hours of the Christian Church the believers had all things in common, establishing an equal fraternity, so in the fullness of time all human beings, having also come to believe in common, shall enjoy an equal fraternity. These hostile groups of armed nations, these cherished hatreds, these cries for vengeance, these despotic dragonings of weaker folks shall be swept away by the broom of Divine wrath. And then shall all alienating barriers be broken down; or, as the Apocalypse puts it, 'there shall be no more sea.' There shall be but one heart and one speech among all men. There shall be the Commonwealth of God, founded in meekness, good-will and humility. We need continually to set our hearts afresh upon this ideal, and to be no whit dismayed by its apparent temporary overthrows. The world does move onward into unity, and the last word about it is not Babel but Pentecost, not disunion but communion, not estrangement but understanding, not war but peace.

¶ Speaking of his travels in Europe at the close of the Great War Dr. John Huston Finley of New York says: 'Barriers and entanglements, visible and invisible, were upon every border all the way across Europe. Unspeakable inconveniences, often hardships, had to be endured by the ordinary traveller in these zones of suspicion and antipathy and hate, till I came to think of the countries they separated as the "United Hates of Europe."'

In the course of his mid-European journeys he came one day to Poland. 'There,' he says, 'I had an experience which lifted my thought into the broader view which ignored barriers and entanglements. It was a journey in an airplane that rose high above boundaries and connected Warsaw with Prague and Strasbourg and Paris. It was the morning of Pentecost Day that I made the journey—the day which celebrates the coming together of people from many nations and

their understanding one another and being understood because of the cloven tongues that descended upon them. As we flew over the prairies of Poland that beautiful, clear spring Sunday morning, I could see the shadow of the plane as of a cloven tongue flying beneath us from village to village, and even over the disputed territory of Upper Silesia. This was the symbolic prophecy of the new sort of understanding, the unifying fabric woven by such shuttles that must by their woof replace the separating entanglement of suspicion and hatred if Europe, and so the world, is to survive something worse than fire or flood.'

### Abraham's Altar

Gen. xiii. 3, 4.—'And he went . . . unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Beth-el and Ai; unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the Lord' (R.V.).

THOUGH the whole land of Canaan lay before Abraham when he and his wife and all that he had returned from their migration to Egypt, he made directly for the site of his old encampment near Bethel and the altar which he had built there when first he arrived in the Promised Land. It was not because the country between Bethel and Ai was familiar ground, or because there was good pasture land in that neighbourhood, that he turned towards it once again. It was the altar that drew him. He had come out of Egypt conscious of certain deep spiritual needs, and he knew that it was only the God whom that altar represented who could satisfy those needs, and give rest to his soul.

The message of this ancient story for us is that we, too, need an altar to which we may, and must, come back again and again: and the story itself suggests three reasons why this is so.

1. We need an altar to turn to *amid the busyness of life*. Abraham, since leaving Ur of the Chaldees, had moved in 'the silence that is in the starry sky, the sleep that is among the lonely hills.' Life for him had been leisurely and unhurried. But Egypt was the home of an advanced civilization, and the scene of great busy-ness. The pace of life on the banks of the Nile was faster than on the hills of Canaan, and Abraham, in the effort to adapt himself to his



new surroundings, would inevitably tax his resources both of body and of mind, and would soon feel exhausted and in need of inward reinforcement. Therefore, as he left Egypt behind him, he turned towards the altar between Bethel and Ai, that he might feel the hand of God laid upon his spirit, restoring that poise and strength of soul which the bustle of Egypt had well-nigh worn away.

We, too, like Abraham in Egypt, are unable to stand the pace of modern life; we, too, are conscious of our continual need of being refreshed and stabilized in body, mind, and soul. Happy are we if, again like Abraham, we know where to turn. Happy are we if in our lives there is an altar to which we continually resort, and a God whose power to give us peace we have thoroughly proved. Faith in Him has been called 'the best preventative against the maladies of the soul, and the most powerful means of curing them'; and quiet fellowship with Him can restore the soul and dissipate that strain and weariness which is the price of living in the modern world.

¶ 'I went to chapel to-night,' once wrote James Smetham, the artist, 'fretting with plenty of dark and vexing suggestions, all sore as to feeling, and I came away calm, sweet, fresh, all my cares gone, rejoicing in the God of my salvation.'

2. We need an altar to turn to *in our times of prosperity*. Abraham, when he came out of Egypt, was rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. He had sheep, and oxen, and servants, and camels. And, man of property that he was, he turned instinctively to the altar at which he had worshipped God in the days when he was not so well-to-do. For he knew well what perils lurk in prosperity, and how wealth may destroy the finer feelings of the soul, alienating a man from God and estranging him from his brethren. And knowing this he fell back upon God, that he might be strengthened to carry his full cup with a steady hand and a humble heart, and that he might learn afresh from God what it is that really matters, and what we are really here for. Knowing that prosperity may lure men to adopt unreal values, and to certain unworthy aims, he longed for a saving vision of life as God sees it, and journeyed to the altar between Bethel and Ai.

¶ 'I was recently led,' said E. V. Lucas, 'by

its owner, rebuilders, and renovators, through the rooms and gardens of a Tudor house which, with infinite thought and discretion, has been reclaimed from decay and made fair and debonair. At every step, indoors and out, was something charming or adequate, whether furniture or porcelain, whether flower or shrub. Within were long, cool passages, where through the diamond panes sunlight splashed on the white walls, and bedrooms of the gayest daintiness; without, were lawns, and vistas, and arrangements of the loveliest colours. "Well," my hostess asked me, "what do you think of it all?" I thought many things, but the one which was uppermost was this, "You are making it very hard to die."'

Mr. Lucas might have gone on to say 'and harder still to live.' Whatever may be the regret with which one says 'Good-bye' to the luxuries of life when the time comes to shuffle off this mortal coil, it is not to be compared with the embarrassment of finding oneself faced with the duty of living aright in rich surroundings.<sup>1</sup>

3. We need an altar to turn to *when we have sinned*. Abraham in Egypt had sinned a great sin. Outwardly he was none the worse for it, indeed, it was to that sin that he owed his great prosperity. But, for all his flocks and herds, he was not at peace. It was not merely that he had incurred Pharaoh's disapproval, and still smarted from his rebuke. It was the sting of his own conscience that troubled him, and the knowledge that he had done that which was evil in God's sight. And he knew that there could be no rest for his spirit until, at that altar, he had made humble confession of his sin, and had received forgiveness.

There are those who have no sense of sin, to whom Abraham's experience is a thing unknown. But others of us know it only too well. We too have lived with an accusing conscience. We too have known that we had sinned not merely against our own souls, not merely against our fellow-man, but against the Most High God; and we have known that until we confessed our sin, and received His forgiveness, we should never be at peace within. We have been bowed down beneath a sense of uncleanness, and have felt that at all costs, by all means, our hearts must be made clean within us. We have been

<sup>1</sup> R. E. Roberts.

conscious of our intolerable separation from God, and we have felt that, above all else that we need, we must be restored to His fellowship, or we perish. How well we understand Abraham's experience, and the urge which drove him to his altar!

If there be no such altar in our lives, at which God meets us in forgiveness, we are of all men most miserable. But blessed are we if we know beyond dispute that God does answer our cry for cleansing and reconciliation in Jesus Christ His Son, our Saviour. Blessed are we if we have proved for ourselves, again and again in the past, that 'He pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel.'

### Lot's Choice

Gen. xiii. 11, 12.—'Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other. Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.'

HISTORY may be described as an epitome of life. Just as evolution asserts that in the structure of man every type of created life is represented, so it may be said that every man epitomizes in himself all the moral forces that make the tragedy or the triumph of life. The passing of thousands of years makes absolutely no difference to the problem: the story of Lot is as human, as real, as vital as though it had happened yesterday; and, indeed, there is no day when it is not being re-acted in human lives.

1. Lot had followed the fortunes of Abraham from the time when he emigrated from Ur of the Chaldees. There seems to have been a mixture of motives in his mind, partly religious and partly selfish. He believed in his uncle's future and no doubt was impressed with his nobility of character, and, doubtless with some stirring of heart, with sincere feeling, he had thrown in his venture with Abraham. They had shared in each other's poverty and hardships, and now shared in each other's wealth. Driven to Egypt by hunger and want of rain, they had returned men of substance, rich in flocks and herds.

They arrived at Bethel, where Abraham had built an altar unto the Lord, 'and there Abram called on the name of the Lord,' but 'the land

was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together.' The difficulty began, not with the principals, but with their retainers. The shepherds strove to get the best grass and the best wells for their special herds. Abraham accordingly proposed a friendly separation, and left it to Lot to choose what part of the country he would settle in.

It was quite like Abraham to do this, in keeping with his noble nature; and we would have expected to see such highmindedness met on Lot's part with equal magnanimity. Deep should call to deep, and height answer height. We expect greatness of soul to be responded to by similar greatness. But it does not follow that generosity meets its own likeness in others. The selfish take advantage of it, and sometimes call it simplicity, trade upon it, and only fall to lower depths in its presence. In this great crucial test of Lot's character he (as no doubt he had often done before) met Abraham's generosity with selfishness.

He lost his chance of meeting Abraham's generosity with equal generosity. For the world had taken possession of his heart. Egypt, which had been to Abraham a discipline, had been to Lot a temptation. His imagination there was inflamed by the sight of wealth beyond dream. His soul was taken captive by the desire to be rich; and Lot lifted up his eyes and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt.

2. So Lot pitched his tent towards Sodom. Worldly advantage was the chief element in his choice. He could not have been wholly ignorant of the reputation of Sodom, but he was in no mood to remember it. He saw the rich, fertile plain, the magnificent opportunities for aggrandizement it afforded, and he conveniently overlooked the character of its inhabitants. He had a keen eye for his worldly interests, but no sense whatever of his spiritual interests. He had no sentimental views about Canaan such as Abraham had; the plain of Sodom was a Promised Land good enough for him. If there was any moral risk in choosing Sodom, he was prepared to take it.

¶ Sodom was a boundary town of the Canaanite settlers; and as befitted such a place, it had all sorts of lurid attractions for all sorts of silly people. I have heard of a



temple over whose portals hangs the figure of a serpent, where the people have given themselves over to the worship of lust and licentiousness. Sodom must have been such a place.<sup>1</sup>

Lot meant to have no part morally in the place. He meant only to reap the earthly advantage. And possibly not much evident harm could come to *himself*; his habits were formed and his life was more or less fixed in its tendency; the risk was very little that he would be infected by the loathsome sins of the cities of the plain. And so he shut his eyes to the risks to his children, and likely enough argued that it was for their good that he made his choice, to make money for them, and advance them in life. In the light of things seen, Lot for the moment had shut out of vision the things unseen. He was acting as though this life were all, as though the only thing worth thinking about were wealth, as though the supreme aim of existence were to become more and more wealthy.

And yet we must not understand that Lot intended to throw away his religion, and to give up the service of God. Had this been the case his whole religious character would have been sacrificed at a stroke, and he would never have obtained mention among the righteous men of the Scriptures. But the religious life was weak within him. For the time being he put his religion out of account, and made his decision in view of worldly principles alone. Probably it did not occur to him that his religious life was involved in the matter.

3. Now the power of the temptation to Lot, as it is the power of it to us, was that the good of the one alternative was *present*, while the good of the other seemed distant. The one could be had at sight, the other only through faith. When Esau is pained and famished with hunger, why should he not give up a far-away thing like his birthright for the present good? When the sound of the silver is in Judas's ear, why should he not at least get that much gain out of a sinking cause? When Paul was in prison and the company of missionaries was scattered and the might of Rome barred the way, why should Demas waste his life for an intangible dream? The seduction of the world is that it is here, palpable, to be had now. It presses on the mind; it presses on the senses. To exercise self-control for the sake of a future blessing, to put off a

present good for a prospective good, needs strength of character and will, and, above all, faith.

Faith is the refusal of the small for the sake of the large. Faith will make no decision, take no step, merely from worldly motives; for it sees past the immediate good to a richer, grander good. Worldly wisdom is not wisdom; it is folly, the blind grasping at what is within reach. It is folly, for any present good, to cut yourself off from your true life. A good conscience, peace of heart, faith, the vision of God, the hope of glory—it is a fool's bargain to barter these for any mess of pottage. Demas thought he was doing a wise thing in leaving Paul when earthly success seemed lost, but this present world, seductive though it was to him, however much it brought him, was a poor, contemptible exchange for the days and nights with Paul, and the life lived by the Son of God. And his name is an infamy. Lot thought he was doing a wise thing in making the choice he did, but a share in the wealth of Sodom was a pitiful substitute for a place in Abraham's company, and a share in Abraham's thoughts and faith. And the end was a ruined home, a desolate life, and a broken heart.

¶ On one occasion the venerable John Morley was called upon to unveil a statue in London to the memory of William Gladstone. He spoke of the great statesman's services to England, especially his stand in private and public life for truth, honour and righteousness. Then looking up at the crowded office windows, where youth was eagerly watching, he cried: 'Young men and women, take sides. Life is a battle between two forces, good and evil, right and wrong, truth and error. Go one side or the other; take sides.'

## The Heart of Religion

Gen. xv. 6.—'And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness.'

NOTHING in the whole range of the Old Testament seems to have helped and heartened the earliest Christians more than, or perhaps so much as, this obscure incident hidden away in Genesis. The most diverse minds kept turning towards it, and seizing eagerly upon it. Paul and James, arguing for the moment in what look like diametrically opposite directions, both found upon it, with the comfortable feeling that here

<sup>1</sup> J. Ithel Jones, in *The Christian World*, Oct. 9, 1941.

they have something very real and solid underneath their feet, that this is the very heart of religion, the thing itself in being, its whole essential meaning and plan and method revealed in one illuminating flash.

Here is a man who believed God, who assumed that He means what He says, and will assuredly stand to it; who lived his life upon that supposition, and held to it doggedly, though the time grew very long, and nothing seemed to come of it. Men smiled at him, dismissing him as an obstinate fanatic who would not face hard, ugly, staring facts. But God, we read, watched him with open exultation. 'My friend,' He called him proudly, in whose hands My good name is entirely safe, who never doubts Me, upon whom I can absolutely count. That is religion, say the Scriptures.

But, practically, what does all this mean for us? If a voice, which we knew to be God's voice, came to us out of the sky, awesome, august, authoritative—ah, then! But we hear no such voice. If a hand were laid upon our arm, as befell Lot that grim day at Sodom, inciting us to urgency! But we are left to pick our stumbling way towards truth, to feel our own uncertain road through this misty and dangerous life, without such palpable helps. And what, then, does it mean to believe God?

1. All of us, surely, have our higher moments of inspiration, when we are lifted up above ourselves, see farther and more clearly. The sun breaks through and glints on life. And as it lies there, touched by that unaccustomed glory, we know that it is meant to be a greatly nobler thing than this crude nothing we are fashioning. We open a book, and some new truth claims us and beckons us imperiously to follow. We meet a friend, and his coolness and steadiness make us shamefacedly conscious of our own hot and dusty fussiness, or his serene faith and quiet eyes challenge our querulous and timid spirits, or his clean, beautiful, unselfish life stings us with an honourable envy. We enter a church, and suddenly the obtrusive world fades away to a thin and insubstantial shadow; and the big things we had forgotten in the noise and bustle of the streets loom up strangely distinct again; and God, who had been crowded from our thoughts, becomes all at once how real, how sure, how near! And with that we have grown dissatisfied with all we are, and are stretching

out eager hands of wistful yearning towards something other and better and quite different from this poor shabby thing that bears our name. Well, that was God. That was His voice. That was Christ passing by and calling us.

To believe in our own highest moments, to hold to it that what we were when we were face to face with Christ and knew it, and felt our heart stirred, that that was our real self, to be unable to forget what we saw then, to be haunted by it, stubbornly to follow it though we may seem to get no nearer to it, to stake our life upon the possibility that it can all come true, and true in us—that is religion. And to laugh it away, to allow ourselves to be coaxed or browbeaten or persuaded or tired into bovine contentment with that petty thing we are, that is the sin against the Holy Ghost; that is to hear God speak, and know that it is God, yet dare to look Him in the eyes, and answer, 'I will not!'

2. But, indeed, it is not easy to believe God. His promises are so tremendous, His hopes for us are so exceeding high, His thoughts are not as our thoughts. 'You must be born again,' says Jesus calmly. And He never asks impossibilities. When He says 'must,' we can. Yet the old Rabbi peevishly pushed that away. What is the use of talking senselessly, like that? he said. How can a man be born when he is old? And when Christ looks at us, and says that our whole character must come down to the very foundations and be rebuilt upon a worthier and ampler plan, that these engrained habits must be broken, that, in short, we must become quite other creatures, with new likings, new dislikes, new powers, new ways, new possibilities, we too are apt to turn away impatiently, or at least to agree with Celsus when he criticizes Christ so confidently, remarking that His whole idea is absurd upon the face of it, and His hopes demonstrably vain. For everybody knows, he says, from long experience of actual life, that, once any one has gone a certain length in sin and folly, there is no smallest prospect of reclaiming him, and cannot be, because inevitably the man is, and must be, carried down the hill, faster and faster, by his own impetus. There is no stopping him, not now. And we despondently agree. This, we say, is what we are, and it cannot be bettered now, not much, not radically. A little patching here and mend-



ing there ; but this is the poor second best there is to hope for now. And it is wistfully and sadly that we look across at Christ and all the beauties and the glories that He offers, beauties that we do covet in our higher moods, and yet know that they are not for us, not now !

Or, at least, it is dully and unexpectedly that we believe, not really much surprised that little happens, and that our unexciting days run so monotonously on and on. And Christ, for His part, turns and asks us searchingly that all-important question which decides everything, as He once did even to a leal friend of His who was bravely speaking right stout words out of a breaking heart. You talk about believing ; but do you believe, really believe, that a soul foiled and baffled, its hopes all crashed to ruin, itself dead and stone cold, can rise again and come out of its tomb, and even yet have a full, rich, satisfying life—believest thou that ? And He waits for His answer with His eyes fastened upon us.

Dare we take God so audaciously and literally at His bare word, and hold to it that He will stand to every syllable He said ? And can we still, unbroken by innumerable falls, shake our fist in the sneering faces of the strong passions that keep mastering us with such exasperating ease in spite of all our struggles, and cry to them defiantly that, though they conquer us a million times, they will never vanquish us, that we will crush them in the end, however long the struggle be ; that the brave dream is going some day to come true ? And can we live, can we wait, can we die, still undauntedly believing in what looks, perhaps, as far away as ever ?

Such hardihood and valour, say the Scriptures, are religion. The essence of the thing is not the winning but the daring, not even the finding but the set resolve that we will seek and seek until, please God, we do find in the end.

¶ I am the Way, said Christ once, not the goal and the prize only, but the route to them as well. To be upon the road seeking for the big dreams that seem to come no nearer—that also is to be in Christ. And every dusty traveller, with tired, plodding feet, and eyes that still look out ahead, is His.

Not for us are content, and quiet, and peace of mind,

For we go seeking a city that we shall never find.

Only the road and the dawn, the sun, the wind,  
and the rain,  
And the watch fire under stars, and sleep, and  
the road again.

We travel the dusty road till the light of the  
day is dim,  
And sunset shows us spires away on the world's  
rim.

3. Or take it of the world—the ailing, sinful, foolish world—with evil seemingly engrained in the very make-up of things. What do we make of it ? The Testament looks out upon it so big-heartedly, is so sure that not one of these mighty evils but will crash to its fall ; already, indeed, it can see them swaying and tottering like trees in some tremendous gale. They were so pitiful a handful, these first Christians, with the whole serried world set frowningly against them, with old, old sins entrenched, seemingly impregnably, in human nature, with everything against them. And yet fearlessly, confidently, they fling down their gauntlet to them all, and have never a doubt of what the ultimate result must be. They learned that gallantry from Jesus Christ, who, as He went to face the Cross and all the blackness of that utter horror, cried back to scared souls on the point of breaking : ‘ In the world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer ; I have overcome the world,’ a saying that moved Carlyle to tears. Such valiant words, he mused, spoken in what a desperate situation !

And all these earliest followers of His had caught from Him that splendid chivalry of spirit, that heroic note. There is never a trace of fear in Paul’s eyes ; rather, as he watches the enemy massing themselves against him, the man is obviously exulting in the coming clash. For in Christ we are more than conquerors.

That is the right fighting spirit ; and faith, to be called faith, can have no other. ‘ The people that know their God,’ says Daniel, ‘ shall be strong, and shall do exploits.’ Ay, who know such a God as ours ! And surely we do know Him, and have had our own unchallengeable experiences of His sufficiency, have cause to be very sure by now that, let the call on us be what it may, His strength is really enough in which to meet it. And yet we are so hesitating, so uncertain ; we compromise so meanly where we might be winning glorious victories ; we

acquiesce so tamely in many things we hate,  
when we might sweep the field !

If only we believed God and His promises,  
assumed that this is true, a thing on which we  
can found ; and so believing, flung ourselves  
whole-heartedly into the struggle with the evils  
that defy us, what would we not see with our  
very own eyes, in our own very day ?

Death closes all : but something ere the end,  
Some work of noble note, may yet be done.  
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks :  
The long day wanes : the slow moon climbs :  
the deep  
Moans round with many voices. Come, my  
friends,  
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.

### God's Particular Providence

Gen. xvi. 13.—'Thou God seest me.'

The slave-girl, Hagar, when she fled  
From Master's wrong and wifely hate,  
Fell in the sand-waste as she sped,  
Heart-sick and lone and desolate :  
Sudden a low sweet music said,—  
'Why murmur at thy fate ?'

Parting the thicket, so to see  
Who spoke in pity,—lo, a face  
Looked up upon her yearningly  
From a well's eye : in ruth and grace  
A fond voice said : 'What aileth thee ?—  
*God is in every place !*'

It was her own young piteous gaze  
Glassed in the well-depth's mystery :  
Low sang the water's sweet amaze,—  
'*God's face ! He knows, He watcheth me :*  
Through trudge of weary nights and days  
*The Living One doth see !*'<sup>1</sup>

1. EVERY Christian believes, and is expected to believe, that God sees him distinctly and particularly. He believes that God knows him separately, and as if—so to speak—there were no other human being in the world. This faith is the ground both of his seriousness and of his confidence and security.

<sup>1</sup> J. Laurence Rentoul, *At Vancouver's Well*, 12.

Because he believes in a particular Providence he must believe in One who sees him in secret, knows the real worth and quality of his life, and with whom in the last resort he has to do ; and the Christian who has all that constantly before his mind can be nothing else but fundamentally serious.

¶ Miss Cicely Hamilton writes in her autobiography<sup>1</sup> : 'Whatever else the acceptance of God may mean in our lives, this it must mean without a doubt : there is a Being—a Something, call It what you will—to whom it is impossible to lie. Of none among men can that magnificent "impossible" be said. Which among us, however desirous of honesty, does not practise petty subterfuge even to his friends ? and—what matters more—does not practise it in flattery to himself ? But to lift up your heart to God, even for a moment, is to place yourself, for that moment, in a Presence that annihilates deceit. *Thou God seest me* as in very truth I am, as no man on earth has ever seen me.'

But this faith is also the ground of the Christian's confidence and security ; for one who believes in God's particular Providence must believe that the events of his life, the ups and downs, have a particular reference to him, that they mean something personal, and that if he on his part preserve a quick and teachable mind, 'all things will work together for good.'

2. Admittedly this doctrine of God's personal interest in each human soul is very hard for the mind to grasp. So much so that men who only regard this truth on the surface have either denied it altogether, or have so diluted it as to render it worthless. Let us consider some of the things that make it hard to believe in God's particular Providence. Then let us try to see through these difficulties.

(1) To begin with, there are occasions on which we are tempted to lose, or even to abandon, the belief that God has a particular knowledge of every separate life, and a great care for it. When, for example, evil fortune overtakes us, when our plans are overthrown, when some hope which was making life a cheerful thing for us goes out in darkness—then we are sorely tempted to lose the great belief without which life is but dust and ashes.

Or we fall into sickness. We lie upon our bed tossing in pain or in a restlessness and impatience

<sup>1</sup> *Life Errant*.



which is worse than pain. We can ill afford to be set aside even for a time, and we dare not think what it would mean were we to be laid aside for ever. What if our children are doomed to face the world without our protection? If our sickness be of a kind that leaves us free to think, if all our fortitude is not being used to endure some commanding pain, we may go on to say to ourselves that we are the playthings of chance, that there is no Loving Hand, guiding the incidents of our life, or of any life.

And yet surely such a condition is just the very one which should make us cling to our faith in God the more. There is no promise from the side of God that we shall never fail, shall never be weak and sick. God has not promised to any of us a smooth life, or that we shall pass through this world without a wound, without the shedding of tears. He has promised that in the case of all who believe in Him and cling to Him, life, and especially the hard things of life, will work together for good; that though again and again, like Jacob, we may one by one be called to wrestle with life through some long slow-passing night, nevertheless, if we are faithful to the end, we shall have won in the conflict the crown of a holier life, a life capable of eternity.

(2) Faith in God seems to carry with it the assertion that He knows us every one. If God is, there cannot be any region from which He is absent. It is impossible to say of anything that it is beyond, and inaccessible to, God. Those, therefore, who believe in God—in a general way, so to speak—but who hesitate to believe in Him as the Guardian and Father of each life, are to be reproved for a want of thoroughness and courage in their *thinking*. They simply refuse to believe a thing of God for no other reason than that it is too wonderful, too good, to be true!

It is a commonplace to say that the tiniest dewdrop feels and obeys the same laws as control the movements of the sun and the stars. The humblest wayside flower is formed and coloured with the same patience as is the most distinguished. In the world of Nature there is no region, however obscure and minute, which is given over to chaos. Just so, we believe that in the world of spirit there is no soul lying under the neglect and abandonment of God. If the whole is in the hands of God, the details also are in His hands. If God knows anything, He must,

for the same reason, know everything. If He is behind and within the whole, He must be behind and within every part, for the whole consists of all the parts.

When we consider an immense multitude of human beings it is difficult to believe that each soul stands out distinctly before God. And yet if we will only consider that multitude more closely, the difficulty becomes less great. Each one in that multitude is the centre of an entire world. Each one is the centre and home of his own thoughts. He stands in the midst of his own history. He lies open continually to his own memories, and purposes, and fears. These all concentrate upon him, making him solitary and unique. He stands in some chosen relation to God, and to the moral principles of this life of ours. He has his face turned in some definite way, which decides his moral identity, so that God must know him at a glance.

¶ Mark Rutherford speaks of 'the impotency of our little intellects to conceive a destiny which shall take care of every atom of life on the globe.' 'We are compelled,' he says, 'to think that in such vast crowds of people as we behold, individuals must elude the eye of the Maker and be swept into forgetfulness. But the truth of truths is that the mind of the universe is not our mind, or at any rate controlled by our limitations.'<sup>1</sup>

But the fact is there are some things that we cannot feel to be true until we believe them to be true and act as though they were true. Notably is this the case with our belief in God's particular Providence. Believe it, and everything comes forward to corroborate our faith—even the difficulties; for how could faith be faith if it had no difficulties to contend with or surmount!

But how undeniable a thing it is that God speaks to us each one in private! How exact and wonderful is His knowledge of us—to judge from the secret signs, the lights and shadows of His approval and of His rebuke which fall upon our soul! How surely we are troubled when we do wrong, when we act against our sense of what was due from us! And, on the other hand, how blest we are when we have done what it was our duty to do, what, as we know, Christ trusted us in the circumstances to do!

And so it comes to pass that when we have once become sure of God's concern over our own

<sup>1</sup> *Deliverance.*

personal career it ceases to be a thing incredible that the same God should brood with the same redeeming intention over all lives, and that in the height and desperateness of His Eternal Concern for man there should have appeared in human history One competent to radiate a light that never was on land or sea, and to demonstrate the sleepless love that throbs for ever on our behalf behind the Veil.

Under an Eastern sky,  
Amid a rabble's cry,  
A Man went forth to die  
*For me.*

Thorn-crowned His blessèd Head,  
Blood-stained His every tread,  
Cross-laden, on He sped  
*For me.*

Pierced through His hands and feet,  
Three hours o'er Him beat  
Fierce rays of noon-tide heat  
*For me.*

Thus wast Thou made all mine ;  
Lord, make me wholly Thine ;  
Grant grace and strength divine  
*To me.*

### An Ishmael for an Isaac

Gen. xvii. 18.—'And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee !'

1. WHEN God gave to Abraham the promise of a new race yet to be born in Isaac, the old man, we read, 'fell upon his face, and laughed.' It needs a certain state of soul before a man like Abraham can laugh at God's promises, however unlikely they may appear.

The thing at which he laughed was the promise of Isaac to be his heir and the founder of Israel. In this, no doubt, his emotions were mixed. There was incredulity that he and his wife might yet have a son, but there was also a deeper feeling to which he here gives expression. He had learned to love the bold, brilliant, impulsive Ishmael, his son and Hagar's the bondmaid. He had been secretly hoping that God would choose the young man as the future founder of the promised Israel. And so, when the promise of the coming Isaac was made

known to him, he offered this prayer : 'O that Ishmael might live before thee'—in the favour of Thy countenance, as Thy accepted and chosen vessel.

In this, of course, there is pre-eminently the natural cry of a father's heart. But, further, there lay in this prayer a man's choice of what seemed a certainty. He was now growing old, and here was Ishmael before him, just budding into manhood, in whom he might see, before he died, the beginning of the great future race. Moreover the coming Isaac was yet but a promise. Years would need to pass by before he could see his hopes fulfilled. Besides, could God find a better than Ishmael for His purpose, one so clever, so bright, so responsive, and so charmingly wayward ? 'Here, O Lord,' he cried, 'here is Ishmael my son, growing into young manhood, seal him as Thy chosen one ; elect him as the founder of Israel. Why must I yet look towards the uncertain future ? O ! that Ishmael might live before Thee.'

2. Abraham's cry opens out vistas of a big and difficult subject. We know that there are elections in the providences of life. History is full of them, national and individual ; and even science has established the election of the fittest. Life selects one man for a high calling, for dignity, for wealth, or for fame ; and others, who to us seemed equally deserving and equally worthy, are left in the common run. How can we explain the apparent partiality ?

(1) One might begin by saying that *election of individuals for individual tasks is in the very nature of things*. Each work, whether it be honourable or lowly, calls for some one to do it. However the choice is made, the choice has to be made. It may be done by the operation of chance, or opportunity, or by the natural laws of the universe, or by the will of God. It does not matter how it is made ; the question is that it *has* to be made. Election of some kind is in the nature of things. Necessity demands it.

(2) Then one might go on to say that *God's election in life is never to favour only, but to service*. If we see this, it may alter our view of the apparent partiality. Israel was chosen not only for its own blessing or its own sake, but also for the world's blessing and the world's sake. Great men are chosen for greatness, not as a privilege but as a responsibility, not that they may be more favoured than others but that



they may serve their generation. When God chooses men, as He chose Elijah and Jeremiah and Paul, He chooses them, as they themselves testify, for work, for agony, for suffering, and even for martyrdom.

¶ At Keswick, in the summer of 1893, Temple Gairdner heard a compelling call, one that sounded in his ears all his life. It was a Saturday afternoon and the campers were out on the lake in a flotilla of little boats moored under an island. Derwentwater was still and sunny; birds were singing on the island and in the boats young figures were lolling at ease. . . . Suddenly a tall, rather majestic figure, standing bare-headed at the prow of one of the boats, uttered an unforgettable call. His hands outstretched, his face with a shining in it that Gairdner never forgot, he cried to that company of happy youth: 'AGONIA is the measure of success.' (It was Robert Stewart, shortly going out to meet martyrdom in China.) 'Christ suffered in agony: so must we. Christ died: so perhaps may we. Our life *must* be hard, cruel, wearisome, unknown. So was His.'<sup>1</sup>

(3) But the special thought regarding God's choice of men and women, which is furnished to us in the case of Abraham, lies simply in this—that *God always chooses the fit instrument*. In His universe we have discovered the law of the 'survival of the fittest' among all forms of life. It is the great contribution of science towards an understanding of the ways of God. Animals, whole species of animals, perish because they are unfit. Even nations live or die according as they are morally and physically prepared. The pages of history are strewn with the world's elections—and the world's elections are God's.

The same is true in the spiritual sphere. You ask the question, 'Why not an Ishmael for an Isaac? Why was the one taken and the other left?' The answer is in line with all the known laws of God—that the one was fit and the other was not. Think for a moment of the character of these two men as described in this book.

Ishmael (both as a man and as a tribe) was brilliant, but he was brilliant by starts and spasms. He lacked the one conquering quality of application, of steady pursuit, and invincible faithfulness. His very nature, however poetic and visionary it might be, made him a desert-man, loving the roving life, and flitting not only from place to place but from duty to duty, like

a robin on the branches of a tree. Whereas, on the other hand, however dull and humdrum Isaac might be, he yet possessed the one quality that makes men and nations great, the quality of absolute faithfulness and of sterling moral application. He was a commonplace man, you say: yes, but a commonplace man with a conception of faithfulness and duty and moral rectitude that was far from commonplace. And, after all, these are the men who rule the world.

The big thing in this world, when all is said and done, is not mind but character, not ability but moral worth, not brilliance but spirituality. We may compare Isaac and Ishmael as we like, but in the end there is no comparison between them; for however prosaic Isaac may have been, he had yet within him qualities of soul of which Ishmael knew nothing. Behind him there was a faith, a quiet strong character, and a capability of a spiritual communion with God that marked him out as a finer man than his brother.

3. Thus we come back to the question of God's election of men and nations in history. What is behind it all? Why is this or that man chosen? Why is this or that nation rejected? As you look at it, you would think, at times, that the balance lay on the side of the rejected. There is little doubt that from many sides, intellectually and otherwise, Byron the Ishmaelite was a keener and brighter spirit than William Wordsworth; indeed, his own generation, here and on the Continent, hailed him as such. But the calm election of history has given the sober and somewhat prosaic Wordsworth a place that Byron can never rival. For, after all, the passing generations of men learn to value what is most eternal in their own hearts—truth, character, and the spiritual things of their own deepest nature. Therefore, before we lightly call God's choice of His agents in the world's history either arbitrary or capricious, let us look to it that we are not blinded by plausible external qualities, thus missing the deep, abiding things that alone make men great.

If this striking story of ancient days tells us anything, it tells us this, that character and moral purpose are supreme, that goodness is better than genius, that a faithful and honest heart is better than brains, and that the only life which meets with the Divine choice is that which seeks God's holy will and lives within His eternal purposes. God always chooses Isaac!

<sup>1</sup> Constance E. Padwick, *Temple Gairdner of Cairo*, 31.

## GOD'S JUSTICE

Gen. xviii. 25.—‘ Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right ? ’

ABRAHAM, the father of the faithful, has complete confidence in the Divine justice. He is facing the prospect of the righteous being destroyed with the wicked in Sodom, and he finds it unbelievable that God should act thus. He puts his thought in the form of a question, but his question implies a profound assurance that the Judge of all the earth will do right. This assurance that the Divine government of the world is a just government, that in His dealings with men God will do what is right, is one of the main pillars of our faith in God which, if it were to give way, would bring all to ruin.

1. The justice of God is a profound subject in connexion with which, if we attempt to discuss it, questions arise which soon carry us far beyond our depth. We begin by asking, what is right? Why do we feel that certain things are right and others wrong? Is the standard of right and wrong a human invention or a Divine ordinance? There are those who teach that the standard is of man's invention. In the history of the race certain actions have been found to be socially useful, and others socially harmful. These, accordingly, have been stamped with approval or disapproval, until men have come to feel under a binding obligation to do or not to do them. But conscience itself rebels against this view. We instinctively feel that the obligation to do right has a Divine sanction. The distinction between right and wrong is no human convention. It is written, we feel, in the constitution of the universe itself. It is more eternal than the hills. Therefore we say, let justice be done though the heavens should fall. Yet when we try to define the relation between justice and the will of God we are at a loss. On the one hand we shrink from saying that right is right simply because God so wills it, as if by arbitrary decree. On the other hand we cannot think of the law of right having an existence independent of God and laying an obligation upon God, like that overruling Fate

of which the ancient Greeks spoke, before which the gods themselves must bow. We are impelled to think that right and the will of God are identical and must always find a harmonious expression. If that be so, then the question, ‘ Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? ’ cannot arise. It is really a meaningless question, for it is inevitable that God will always act in accordance with His holy and righteous will, that He cannot conceivably do violence to His own character and transgress His own decree. Accordingly if questions of this sort are raised it should be kept in view that we are dealing, not with God's justice, but with our imperfect perceptions of it, a very different thing. At the same time, while this may be very true and logical in the abstract, it brings but little satisfaction to our minds and comfort to our hearts.

2. For we feel impelled to raise the question of the Divine justice. All our experience of human life presses it upon us again and again. To our eyes it is far from being clear that the world is governed in righteousness. There is so much in human experience that seems flatly to contradict it. Take the case that presented itself to Abraham, the indiscriminate destruction of the righteous with the wicked. How often has it happened, not only through man's wickedness, as in war, but through the act of God, when the homes and cities of men have perished by earthquake and fire and flood! To thoughtful minds in the Old Testament, as we can see in the Book of Psalms, it was a continual and vexing problem why God suffered the wicked to prosper and so often afflicted the righteous. One solution after another was offered and found inadequate. The problem is still with us, and is so obvious, so universal, so pressing that it needs no detailed description. Multitudes seem from the very first to have no fair deal; the sufferings of mankind are so vast, so cruel, so seemingly needless, that the very thought of it all becomes at times unbearable. Wordsworth speaks truly of ‘ the heavy and the



weary weight of all this unintelligible world.' It is not a world made to our mind, not such a world as we should have conceived. We would gladly take this sorry scheme of things, if that were possible, and shape it nearer to our heart's desire. Perhaps in no previous age has the mystery of the world's pain and suffering lain so heavily upon the human heart. Books almost without number have been written which paint the picture in the darkest colours and openly challenge the justice of the Creator.

Philosophy has offered explanations of the problem, suggesting that the world may be the confused resultant of the clash of forces of good and evil, or that the Creator has to work with material that is refractory and stiff to mould, or that the whole is the product of blind chance. These explanations are at one in assuming that the world is not ordered in accordance with what we regard as justice. Religion on her part holds out the hope of some future compensation which will redress the balance and vindicate Divine justice. There is a happy time coming. 'All now mysterious shall be bright at last.' Those who have not had a fair deal, or have failed in the first trial, will get a second chance. By one means or another evil will be cast out and good will prevail; all wrong will be righted and justice done. But these promised compensations do not quite meet the case. It is still possible for the critic to reply, 'A second chance, but why was the first chance not fair? A happy time coming, but why is this present time so full of pain and misery? Evil finally overthrown, but why was evil ever allowed to enter God's world and blast man's happiness?' When we honestly face the grim facts it is no easy task to

assert Eternal Providence,  
And justify the ways of God to men.

If we venture to set our minds to it we have need in all humility to pray with Milton,

what in me is dark  
Illumine, what is low raise and support.<sup>1</sup>

3. Above all else, we need to keep continually in view that we are not competent to judge. When, greatly daring, we take it upon ourselves to sit in the seat of judgment we are really demanding that God's acts shall conform to our

ideas. Along this line much has been written that is foolish, and demands have been made that are presumptuous. Immortality, for example, has been claimed as man's due. God, it is widely believed, would be doing less than justice to mankind unless He has provided an eternity of blessedness for every individual. Now when we are tempted to criticize the Divine justice and to lay down what God is under obligation to do for us, there are certain considerations which may clearly show us that it is not our place to judge.

(a) *For we are created beings.* God is in heaven and we upon the earth. We shall do well to ponder more than we do on the fact that God is our Maker and we are the work of His hands. The Shorter Catechism speaks of God's 'sovereignty over us and His propriety in us,' and it is the simple truth that creatorship implies absolute ownership. The creature has no existence, no standing, no rights except such as have been given by the Creator, and beyond that can have no claim of rights. So St Paul argues, 'Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?' Grave exception has been taken to this word of the apostle's, on the ground that he ceases to reason and simply ends the argument with a club. But after all are we not wholly in His power who created us, and do we not need to emphasize this truth in view of the humanism prevalent in our time, a humanism which consistently exalts man as the lord of creation and the measure of all things?

But, it may be said, we have the gift of reason and conscience. We can discern between the true and the false, the right and the wrong. Surely we must be guided by reason and conscience, must judge and act in accordance with them. And if God's dealings with mankind seem to us unjust we must rise up to condemn them, otherwise both reason and conscience are brought to utter confusion. But stay! Are not reason and conscience themselves God's gift to us? Is not our very sense of right and wrong God-given? We have no independent standard by which we may pronounce upon God's dealings with men. 'He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see?' How, then, shall He that set conscience within man's breast, Himself violate conscience? When, therefore, we are inclined

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, i. 22-26.

to sit in judgment and declare that the Judge of all the earth is not doing right, we shall do well to reflect on this, to pause also and take certain other things into account.

(b) *We have not all the facts before us.* No judge, however gifted with reasoning power and however keen his sense of right and wrong, can possibly give a righteous judgment unless he have all the facts before him. To say that implies no disparagement of his mental and moral powers. So it is no disparagement of human reason and conscience to say that man is not competent to pass judgment on the ways of God. By all means follow the light of reason and conscience, but do not forget what John Knox said to Mary Queen of Scots, 'Conscience, Madam, requires knowledge.' And what does our knowledge of God's great world and of the endless complexities of human life amount to? It can only be reckoned to be meagre in the extreme and wholly inadequate as a basis of judgment. Our lifetime, and even the accumulated experience of the race, is but a passing glimpse of the procession of the ages. The sum of human knowledge does but touch the fringes of reality. The greatest scientists and thinkers have been most ready to confess how little they knew and how much was still hidden from their sight. It was a sense of this that overwhelmed and silenced the patriarch Job when the infinite variety and wonder of creation passed before his mind as in a panorama. 'I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. . . . Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.'

Even within the limits of our own experience we may err in judgment because we have not all the facts before us. Looking at the world's sufferings in general we often feel the burden and the mystery of it all to be unbearable. At the same time our own troubles and sufferings, of which we have had our share, we have not found unbearable. That suggests the question whether other sufferers may not be having a like experience. Robert Louis Stevenson, himself a notable sufferer, gave this testimony: 'That which we suffer ourselves has no longer the same air of monstrous injustice and wanton cruelty that suffering wears when we see it in the case of others.'<sup>1</sup> We are often amazed at the uncomplaining patience, and even cheerfulness, of sufferers, and feel that were we in their

position it would be beyond endurance. Such judgments are hypothetical and precarious. We know it is a travesty to paint Nature as 'red in tooth and claw,' and probably no life is so wholly dark and tragical as it may appear to the onlooker. So we must not too confidently judge. There have certainly been pictures painted of the miseries of man's earthly lot so sombre in colour that we are left wondering how the human race had consented under such conditions any longer to exist.

(c) Further, *our capacity of judgment is impaired.* Our perceptions of right and wrong are blunted. We follow the light of reason, but what if the light that is in us be darkness, as our Lord suggests? What if conscience itself is become weak and defiled? It is then no longer a safe guide, still less an infallible one. However lightly we may treat the fact of sin, and however we may disguise the influence it has upon our minds and hearts, it remains true that all our moral judgments are deeply affected by it. As the poet Burns says, 'it hardens a' within, and petrifies the feeling.' It is this above all else which blinds us to the real situation. We ourselves are transgressors of the moral law. While we presume to sit in the seat of judgment and pronounce upon the justice of the Divine government, our proper place is at the bar to be judged ourselves. We may easily see in the case of others how blind men become in mind and conscience so that they turn quite away from truth and right moral feeling, and say to evil, 'be thou my good.' We cannot suppose that we are exempt from this perversion. We are prejudiced in our own favour; we expect more than we have a right to expect. Our ideals are debased; our desires run counter to the holy and loving will of God. 'We know not what we should pray for as we ought,' because we know not what is in our own best interest. Like thoughtless children we prefer present pleasure to ultimate good. So it inevitably comes about that, looking out upon the world through sin-darkened eyes, we see much that is hard and needlessly cruel; and judging God's dealings with men by our own imperfect standards we are ready to impugn His justice. Surely it becomes us rather to say with the Psalmist, 'I kept silence because Thou didst it.' Surely we may well believe that if God's thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways, the reason is that as the heavens are higher

<sup>1</sup> *Letters*, i. 370.



than the earth so are His thoughts higher than our thoughts and His ways higher than our ways. Surely it is reasonable to think that some great work is afoot, that some grand design is being wrought out which, though it may now appear to us a meaningless tangle of twisted and tortured threads, shall one day be made gloriously plain.

4. So, finally, we are thrown back on faith, the simple faith of little children by which we enter the kingdom of heaven. After all, what are we in God's great world but little children, and what can we do but trust? We have been given solid grounds for trust. God's dealings with the world may indeed seem dark and mysterious to our eyes, but then God has dealt with us in grace. In His infinite mercy He has given what we had no right to ask or to expect, a revelation in Christ of His love and will to save. 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.' If there be blame for sin He willingly takes it upon Himself; if there be pain and sorrow He bears it for us and with us. So that in Him we are reconciled to God, and that means we are reconciled to God's dealings with us and with the world. We are assured beyond all doubt that the Judge of all the earth will do right because He has shown us His grace and mercy. To those who have believed in Christ the question of God's righteousness does not arise. The matter, as St. Paul says, is placed beyond dispute. 'He that spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?'

Having such assurances it becomes possible to trust God under all conditions, even as Job did who said, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.' It is reasonable to think that 'a Father's hand will never cause His child a needless tear.' We have passed beyond the cold regions of argument into the warmer atmosphere of personal intimacy. Sir Arthur Eddington says that just as intimate friends would laugh together over arguments designed to prove the non-existence of each other, so 'if we have that relationship (with God) the most convincing disproof is turned harmlessly aside. If I may say it with reverence, the soul and God laugh together over so odd a conclusion.'<sup>1</sup> We are painfully aware that much in life is still dark and mysterious and hard to bear; we confess

that our faith, being but dim and feeble, is sorely tried and like to faint. Yet we take courage to believe that all things, even the dark and bitter things of life, are working together for good. Wherefore we say, 'My soul, hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him.'

J. H. MORRISON.

## Even one Good Man

Gen. xviii. 32.—'And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake.'

2 Kings xix. 34.—'For I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.'

It is becoming more and more apparent that the world struggle is not a struggle between this and that nation, or between one ideology and another: it is a conflict between good and evil. Which of these two contending forces is the stronger—good or evil? That is what every one wants to know to-day. Two answers are being given to this question, and each answer is the logical conclusion derived from the facts. What, then, are the facts?

1. Here is the first group of facts.

In 1939 Konrad Heiden published a book called *One Man Against Europe*. If that title were rewritten to-day it might be well worded 'One Man Against the World.' Let us put that fact into figures. The population of the world is said to be about two thousand millions. According to recent information the membership of the Nazi Party is no more than three millions. And yet—Which is the stronger, good or evil? The figures seem to speak for themselves.

In a basket there are twenty apples and one of them is rotten. What will happen in time? Will the nineteen good ones transmit their virtue to the one bad apple and convert it into a good one?

Why do children pick up bad habits and naughty words more readily than they do good ones? Bacon tells us why: 'For ill, to man's nature as it stands perverted, hath a natural motion, strongest in continuance.'

'An act by which we make one friend and one enemy,' wrote the English parson, Caleb Colton, 'is a losing game, because revenge is a much stronger principle than gratitude.' And

<sup>1</sup> *Science and the Unseen World*, 43.

the German, Wilhelm Schaefer, would agree with him: 'A drop of hate sticks more tenaciously than all the love in the world.' And so one might continue.

But let us take the long view. What of the contagious power of good and evil when handed down from generation to generation? Let Shakespeare's Antony speak:

The evil that men do lives after them,  
The good is oft interred with their bones.

Nor are the men of the Bible unaware of the ugly side of the law of retribution: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.'

So much for the evidence. What is the verdict? Undoubtedly the logical conclusion based upon such facts is that, of the two, evil is the stronger.

2. Let us now turn to another group of facts.

(1) Abraham was a good man. He was called the friend of God. There was a certain city in which he was personally interested (he had a nephew living there), the city of Sodom. And that populous city was a sink of corruption. Abraham wants to know how much goodness would be required to counteract and conquer all that matted mass of evil. He puts the question to God. With engaging simplicity he asks God how many good men would be necessary to save Sodom from its doom. Would fifty be enough? Yes, that would be ample. 'And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.' Abraham is pleased, but not satisfied. He lowers the figure by five at a time, and as his number of good men dwindles he grows more and more apologetic until, at last, he reaches the number ten. God reassures him, however, and tells him that ten good men would be enough. 'I will not destroy it for ten's sake.'

But why stop at ten? Apparently Abraham is too modest to ask too much. Any number of good men less than ten, Abraham thinks, would be a minority far too small to have any effect upon the evil incarnate in all those thousands of corrupt Sodomites. What a pity Abraham did not continue the conversation. Let us try to do so. 'Forgive my persistence,' Abraham goes on, 'but I do so much want to know. What if

there were only one good man amongst all those evil men, would the goodness of one man have any effect at all?' And God answers: 'Yes! One good man would make all the difference in the world. I will not destroy it for one's sake.' And while Abraham was turning this over in his mind and wondering what to say next, God breaks in and says to him: 'Abraham, why don't you be that one? If I had one good man like you as my agent and witness in Sodom there would be hope for Sodom even yet.' That is simply applying a principle which is worked out not only in the Bible but in all history, the principle, namely, that the moral leaven of one good man can and does possess enough vitality to counteract and to conquer the evil of a whole community and to save it from destruction. It is the principle that sent Chalmers to New Guinea, Paton to the New Hebrides and Schweitzer to the primeval forest. These, and countless others, are winged with that self-same power of God who sent His Son into the world that the world through Him might be saved. It is the great missionary principle—that to be alone with God is to be in the majority.

(2) Jerusalem is threatened with invasion by Sennacherib. Not only is there danger from without, there is corruption within. 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die.' Could anything, could any amount of goodness, avail to counteract all that mass of feebleness and corruption? Here is God's answer to Isaiah: 'I will save this city, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.' One man! One good man! 'For my servant David's sake.' But David was not there! David had been dead and gone these three hundred years! What could it mean? Among other things, surely this: that the moral force of one good man, filtering down through thirty decades, is vital enough actively to influence the course of history for good after the lapse of three hundred years.

(3) In the Parable of the Sower the harmful weeds seem to come up more or less in the natural course of things. But in the Parable of the Tares there are hints of something far more sinister and malign. While the good man and his helpers are asleep the wicked man comes and poisons the crop on purpose. There is an appalling amount of deliberate devilry being done in the world to-day, and many people are asking why God allows such a state of affairs to



continue. A few judicious adjustments here and there by the overruling Providence would make a world of difference. Why not take up the tares for the good of the wheat? Why does God not remove 'this wicked man,' or that, so as to give men of good will and upholders of good causes a chance? The answer is that, if it were necessary, He would no doubt do so. But it does not appear to be necessary. That is Jesus' answer. There is in goodness, just because it is goodness, enough potency to overcome the world's evil, however malignant and overpowering that evil, at any time and in any form, may seem to be.

¶ Radium has remarkable radio-activity. That is to say that the element communicates itself to other bodies brought into proximity to it. Let the Holy Spirit take possession of a man's soul and he becomes at once radio-active. His influence passes to many other lives. An old author, referring to Milton's plea for liberty, casually says that, when he wrote, every fourth person was horribly disfigured by smallpox. Milton's plea for liberty was radio-active and catching. Charles I. was beheaded by it. It has banded nations in a ring of steel to crush tyranny. But the smallpox is practically gone. There could scarcely be found one in a thousand 'horribly disfigured by smallpox' to-day. Goodness is more catching and radio-active than evil. Late in life, the great, good Earl of Shaftesbury declared that he owed everything to his old nurse, Maria Millis, though she died when he was still very young. 'From her,' he said, 'I got my faith, my hope, my Christ.'<sup>1</sup>

3. Let us sum up. Facts, like figures, may be made to prove anything. But selected facts can never reach the truth; only all the facts can do that. That man is blind who sees no evil in the world to-day, but blinder still is he who sees nothing but evil. The first group of facts led logically to the conclusion that evil is stronger than good. But one vital piece of evidence was missing. It was the fact of God—that God is, and that God is at work. Now bring God in. Admit God as evidence. That is done in the second group. All the facts are there, including the fact of God.

Why does Jesus say that the tares can be left to grow among the wheat? Why is it true, in spite of the apparently overwhelming forces

of evil at work in the world to-day, that goodness, without any miraculous removals, will triumph? It is because the world is God's field, and God is in the field watching His crop.

What grounds have we for believing that, if God had had in Sodom one good man like Abraham, there would have been hope for Sodom and all its evil population? Why can the Bible declare that the bequeathed goodness of a consecrated life like David's is potent and active after the lapse of three centuries? It is because both Abraham and David were in the line of succession. They were in the main current of the Divine purpose. And so is every man who is a friend of God and a fellow-worker with God. Wherever goodness appears God becomes responsible for it and guarantees its triumph.

¶ A friend of mine, the manager of a hosiery factory, said to Bill the stoker the other day: 'Bill,' he said, 'don't you think it's wonderful—the way we are prospering in these days?' 'Yes,' said Bill, straightening himself, 'somebody's holding the banner up.' 'What do you mean by that?' asked my friend. 'Well, it's like this,' said Bill. 'I reckon somebody's praying for this country.' My friend pondered for a moment, and then it suddenly dawned upon him. 'Great God,' he broke out, '*that might be me!*'<sup>1</sup>

## The Loss of Influence

Gen. xix. 14.—'And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons in law . . . and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law.'

WHEN Lot spoke to his sons-in-law, appealing to them to come away from Sodom, he was altogether in earnest, and he was altogether right. And yet his previous relations with his sons-in-law had been of such a kind that his words had no weight, no influence at all. Lot 'seemed unto his sons-in-law as one that mocked'—as one who was only pretending.

He had lived before their eyes. They had observed him. They had seen him off his guard. They had been admitted, doubtless, to

<sup>1</sup> N. M. Caie, *The Secret of a Warm Heart*, 90.

<sup>1</sup> T. Tudor Rhys, in *The Expository Times*, lii. 424.

many intimacies with him, and the consequence of it did not appear until this day of emergency, when Lot wanted genuinely to help them, and when he found, and they found, that there was not that relation between them which would convey or permit any moral influence or authority. When the day came in which he would have truly helped them, they looked across at him as though to say: 'What part is this you are playing now? What do you want to be at? Who are you to adopt that tone? It was you who brought us into Sodom; you encouraged us to live in it; you yourself have always seemed to be very much at home in it. What has happened?'

¶ In the French Revolution, when madness mounted high, we are told by historians that there was one man of genius who had it in him to ride the storm and direct it for the public weal. That was Comte Mirabeau. But in his youth he had been a profligate. And at last when he wanted to do good he was unable, for none would trust him: they could not believe that a man of his past could be simple and honest. That was the tragedy of his last days. 'Ah, how the immorality of my youth,' he cried, 'hinders the public good.'<sup>1</sup>

There is an old Hindu proverb which says, translated, 'Words are the daughters of earth, but deeds are the sons of heaven.' Lot's words might be burning words, but his life was inconsistent. Lot's message, charged with urgency—it could not be otherwise—might possibly have impressed them as being a more than usual display of emotion. But they knew Lot. And 'he seemed to them as one that mocked.'

1. The first thing we may say about the loss of influence is that it is for the most part a gradual result. On the other hand, it is often a very sudden thing, or at least the discovery of it is very sudden. In relation to one another, we may be like the two ships in Clough's poem which set out side by side and all the night they dreamed they were cleaving the self-same waters, but at daybreak they were discovered by each other away on different horizons.

But O blithe breeze! and O great seas,  
Though ne'er, that earliest parting past,  
On your wide plain they join again,  
Together lead them home at last.

<sup>1</sup> R. Glaister.

One port, methought, alike they sought,  
— One purpose hold where'er they fare,—  
O bounding breeze, O rushing seas!  
At last, at last, unite them there!

A man is one day found out in some wickedness, and there and then the altars of trust are thrown down in the hearts of all who look at him. But even in such a case it is only the discovery that is sudden, and the public fact; the process which led up to it all within the man was secret and gradual.

There is this very hard law in life—and we should all lay our account with it—that we may suffer in this very matter of influence, not for our sins only, but for our mistakes. One may suffer, for example, because of his manners, because of the way he speaks, it may be because of an abruptness and thoroughness which does not make allowance for the slowness of other people's minds. Many a career has been spoiled by the man's address. But unless we are all no better than petted children, this kind of loss of influence is not serious, and if on both sides there is even an approach to good will these separations of spirit will be filled in.

Still, life is so short, and these alienations are so pitiable, that we should apply Christian principles to our outward manners and to the little casual things we do towards one another. There ought to be no more poignant regret for any of us than the feeling that we have wounded the sensibilities and prejudices of another. But on the other hand we should be full of an equal regret and sense of blame if we have allowed ourselves to be wounded and aggrieved by things which, when one recalls the profound and tragic nature of our life, were of very small importance.

¶ I have seen many instances of gifted men ruining their chances of getting on in life simply from want of manners. It is well worth while to try to act naturally and without self-consciousness, and above all, kindly. That is how dignity is best preserved. Some men have a natural gift for it. All ought to try to acquire it. Emerson has written an admirable essay on manners which I advise you all to read. 'Defect in manners,' he says, 'is usually defect in fine perceptions.' He, like Goethe, laid great stress on urbanity and dignity. These two great critics of life were both keenly aware of what injustice people do to themselves and to



their prospects in life by not attending to the graces, which in their best form come from goodness of heart and the fine perceptions which accompany that goodness. It makes a great difference to ourselves if we are careful in considering the feelings and repugnances of other people in small things as well as in great. Let us try to be too large-minded to resent an apparent want of consideration for ourselves, which really comes, in most cases, from defective manners in those with whom we may have to deal.<sup>1</sup>

2. There are many small misdemeanours which come short of high-handed wickedness that nevertheless play havoc with our moral influence and prestige over others and their confidence in us. Any want of faithfulness to our spoken word is one of the ways by which we may stultify ourselves and reduce ourselves to impotence in relation to other people. And if we have given our word to a religious and Christian profession to which we are not faithful in the actual habit and direction of our life, we have there reduced ourselves to the position of people who do not mean what they say and who are treated accordingly.

It is just here that for the most part the moral authority of parents first begins to totter, or gradually to wear through. We say things and do not stand by them to the letter. We promise things and we even forget what we promised. And so our children come to think that we are ready to say anything to suit the exigency of the moment. In this way we train in our children that most pernicious of all habits of mind, namely, that words are not real things; that they simply form what constitutes the higher subtilty of man over the animals, or over those who are weaker than himself; that speech is a mere trick, a mere accomplishment by which to escape some pressure of circumstance. But the day comes when a parent does want to speak gravely and lovingly to his child, a father to his son, a mother to her grown-up daughter; and God have mercy upon us if, when we speak, we seem to them what Lot seemed to his sons-in-law—one who is acting a part, one who is merely pretending.

3. There is only one thing that any of us can do to any purpose if we know or suspect that we are losing or have lost the moral respect of

<sup>1</sup> Viscount Haldane, *The Conduct of Life*, 19.

those with whom we should like to remain on sound and honourable terms. There is only one way by which it may be we can get back the right of entry into their minds and hearts. Of course, it is quite impossible so long as we persist in the very courses which have destroyed our influence. The only thing we can do, the one thing we *must* do, is to enter into our private chamber, and shut the door, and lift up our heart to our Father who sees in secret, who knows everything and understands everything, and who alone has the entrance into other minds as He has into ours. We cannot patch 'up a moral or spiritual reputation. We must get and win an entirely new one.

The path by which we recover lost influence, like every path that takes a man nearer to God and to the truth about himself, is sure to be a hard path—a true way of the Cross. But a good man does not want things to be made easy for him. He may have to apologize here and there. He may have to confess things which have lain hidden in his breast. Still, let him not hesitate. He is standing at the gate of new life. It may be an iron gate. Still, let him go right up to it, and he will find that it will open of itself and admit him to the City of God.

## The Arrested Sacrifice

Gen. xxii. 2.—'Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.'

THIS story stands out from the pages of the Old Testament in more than one respect. As a piece of literature it is almost unique, even among so much in the narrative portion of the Old Testament that must excite the admiration of all lovers of the masterpieces of descriptive writing. Its most notable feature is its reticence. There is an art which conceals art, and that is great art. But there is an even greater art, which is so much one with nature that it is unconscious of itself. It is found in its perfection here.

1. A decisive exposition of this passage was given some sixty years ago by Dr J. B. Mozley in his *Ruling Ideas in Early Ages*—one of those expositions which let light in upon a theme once for all. As there are certain ideas and ideals afloat in the social atmosphere of our time—certain conceptions of personal duty and social

decency—and the Divine imperative, to a certain extent at least, appeals to us through these, so in early ages there were certain sets of ideas generally accepted, and the God of a growing revelation had to use them even while He was leading men above and beyond them. This principle is, of course, employed in every form of teaching—the accommodation of lesson and method to the stage the pupil has reached. For infants, kindergarten; for older pupils, the higher standards; for real scholars, the heights and the depths—the pupil is not treated at one stage as he is at another. This also is God's method with that fretful and difficult pupil, humanity. He dealt so with the patriarchs. Indeed, He deals so with ourselves.

There is a second consideration which helps to mitigate the difficulties of the story for the reader of to-day: it is the duty of setting the whole incident in the light of its end. If a message came to men in the language of their own day and left them on the level where they had been, we might reasonably say of it that it was merely the product of the age to which it belonged. If a message came to men in the language of their own age, and left them lower and baser than it found them, we might say that it was but the re-awakening of the savage in man's soul, the gravitation of the pit into which he is always liable to tumble. But if a message comes to men in the language of their own age and leaves them higher and better and wiser than it found them, must there not be something of the Divine about it, something of the forward and upward call which is one of the chief proofs of a real revelation? That is what we have in this passage. Some contemptuous modern spirits dismiss it as the mere story of a human sacrifice; but when it is read to the end it proves to be the story of the *arresting* of a human sacrifice. At the end of it, is not Abraham greater in stature, and is not the God of a progressive revelation seen more clearly?

2. 'It came to pass that God did prove Abraham,' or, in Dr Moffatt's rendering, 'God put Abraham to the test.' There is no difficulty about that, because for every man, whether he be of Abraham's stature or not, life is a place of proving and testing and discipline. Our scruples begin when we come to the nature of this test.

Lecky tells a story about a man in Thebes

who wanted to become a monk. The abbot asked him whether he had anybody belonging to him. 'I have a son,' he said. The abbot replied, 'Take your son and throw him into the river.' The man went off to carry out the command, and the monks, having thus tested the whole-heartedness of his purpose, stopped him when he was dragging his son to the river's bank. It was a test, and a sore test; but was it a right and fair test? Was it a test which in the faintest degree suggests to us the voice of God? Not in this, the Christian era; but there is much meaning in the fact that Abraham's story dates from a time long before the Christian era dawned. It is very important in Abraham's case to call our historical sense to our aid. For, in that early age, one of the ruling ideas from which nobody entirely escaped was that of the absolute power of the community over the individual and of the parent over the child. In Greek story there is the legend of Agamemnon and his attempted sacrifice of his daughter Iphigenia: people saw the pathos and the pain of it, but they did not see anything morally impossible in it. If we add to that the fact that human sacrifice was probably not infrequent in the tribes of Abraham's environment, it is possible to feel how thoroughly the story belongs to its period.

So there was started in that great soul the conflict which is of the essence of all tragedy—the conflict between rival duties, often a far keener conflict and more rending to the heart than the conflict between right and wrong. On the one hand, there was the instinct which told him that he, the friend of God, the man for whom God had done so much, must rise at least as high as the level of his pagan neighbours and give his best and uttermost to God. On the other hand, there was his love for his son. And, added to his love, there was his duty to all the future of his race, which, set in the light of the promise, had looked so fair and sure.

¶ Abraham felt himself faced with the same call to sacrifice that our young countryman, Rupert Brooke, felt and so tellingly recorded:

These laid the world away; poured out the red  
Sweet wine of youth; gave up the years to be

Of work and joy, and that unhopd serene,  
That men call age; and those who would  
have been,

Their sons, they gave, their immortality.



3. The core of the story is the thought which runs like a golden thread through the whole history of sacrifice—that what God desires is the spiritual thing, the offering and dedication of the will. It goes without saying that we must keep our sense of time, and not turn Abraham all at once into a New Testament Christian. The world was yet in its childhood, and the reign of visible and material symbols was not yet over. That was why 'Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.' Because Abraham reached to the best that he could attain of submission and devotion, God made his act the gateway of lessons and duties better still. If we interpret it so, we see it from the right angle and in the right light, and it becomes possible to stand with Abraham on Moriah and look straight across the ages to Calvary, even to Him who offered Himself without spot unto God.

The form in which the challenge came to Abraham's will is accidental—conditioned by times and surroundings: a challenge in such a form would be intellectually and morally impossible to-day. But the spirit of his response is the spirit of all sacrificial lives. They are to be found climbing Mount Moriah from all lands and ages—climbing the hard highway of self-surrender and self-renunciation until they shine above us like stars:

Look what a company of constellations!

Say can the sky so many lights contain?

Hath the great earth these endless generations?

Are there so many purified thro' pain?

So if this man seems very remote, doing things we can scarcely understand, and speaking the language of another age than ours, in another sense he is very close to us—especially close to those who wrestle with the hard mysteries of God's Providence. We do well to learn from him the lesson of trust—of trust even in the darkest night, and of submission—of submission even to God's hardest demands. For us as for him the Lord will provide. How full and how loving that provision is we learn when we look away from ourselves, and behold, entangled for our sakes in the thicket of human need and sorrow, the lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

## The Father's Heart

Gen. xxii. 8.—'So they went both of them together.'

1. NOBODY with the least touch of imagination, or any power at all to think himself into another's place, can read the story of Isaac's sacrifice without feeling something hard and cold gripping him tight about the heart. The situation is so merciless and so pathetic. That first glimpse of the distant hills, at sight of which the father's heart must have stood still; and these two, all in all to one another, moving on alone; that sudden question of a half-awakened fear, with the lad's eyes full upon his face; the long climb with drawn, grey faces in that awful silence. As we read, the heart cries out with pain, so vivid and heart-breaking is it all, although the hearts that suffered have been still for some four thousand years.

Think what it meant to Isaac! In those days human sacrifice was common and habitual enough. Scholars, indeed, insist that the full meaning of this story is that it was there on Mount Moriah that the truth first came home to any man that this thing must end, was really a monstrosity and an offence to God. However that may be, it was commonly practised in those days; and, with that grim background to his thoughts, his was no idle question shot at random out of simple curiosity; nor would it need a very subtle mind to hear in Abraham's guarded answer more than his heart could speak! And life is sweet; and he was young, still looking out with flushed cheeks on that wonderful future which hid and held so much that his heart coveted. A little while and he, too, would set sail, and win the land where dreams come true. And, sudden as an arrow burying itself in his breast, came the cold, awful truth! And yet the lad went on. There are no hot reproaches, no wild outcry; but in tense and utter silence he climbed on and on, with what thoughts jostling one another in his mind, till Abraham stopped and said, 'Here is the place'—and—it had come.

And yet, surely, it is to Abraham that one's heart runs out first. Was ever man so agonized and tortured? The light of his whole life, and he must dash it out, and henceforth grope in a gross darkness! The boy, his boy, who filled his heart with hope and happiness! Had not God said that 'In Isaac' he would certainly be

blessed—this Isaac within a few paces now of death? Did God, then, never keep His word—was there no truth in Him at all? It was so long now since he had set forth from Haran to inherit the land God had surely promised him time and again; and his whole life had slipped away since then, and even yet he owned no foot of it, not even so much as would allow him bury his dead. And still his stubborn heart believed on doggedly, refused to cease to trust, even when further trust seemed simply foolishness. God had said it; and on His word he leaned his whole weight unfalteringly. And in the end, when hope's last dogged spark was winking itself out, that daring faith was justified, for the boy came. And with that God renewed the best of all His promises, and even added to them more and more. To Abraham himself, indeed, it could not be. He must go to his grave a homeless wanderer, must die 'in faith, not having received the promises,' still trusting to the very end. But the boy would enter into all that his father's faith had won for him. So God had said, over and over. And now a second time he was being cheated. Why did He give the lad only to take him back? Why, in excess of cruelty, did He make him the instrument for dashing out the hope of which his whole life had been one long, loyal pursuit?

2. What a wild tumult of emotions—outraged love, a father's breaking heart, a faith burdened till it could bear no more—must have been surging and swelling within the man's soul, although he spoke no word, but climbed on steadily. 'So they went both of them together,' to and through their common sorrow; but, if the lad's face was drawn and pale, are there not beads of a far sorer agony standing out on the father's anguished forehead?

¶ We may recall the story of Cassy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. She had been dragged through every possible defilement of slavery, but so long as her children were preserved to her she kept some measure of hope. At length the final blow came. They were sold. And passing a calaboose one day she suddenly heard a child's voice, and her little boy ran screaming to her and caught desperately on to her dress. Rough men snatched the boy back, and carried him away, swearing that they would give him a lesson he would never forget. Poor Cassy turned and ran, with the screams of the beaten

child ringing in her ears. Something seemed to snap in her head, and she fell into delirium. Far, far harder to bear than all her own pain and ignominy was the agony of her boy, whom she was powerless to save.

No wonder that Abraham was called 'the father of the faithful'! No wonder that a faith so remarkable, and an obedience so complete, were counted unto him for righteousness. Once on a day the Prince of all Believers climbed a hill yet more steep, with a cross yet heavier pressing hard upon His heart, into a darkness even grosser and more black. For God had promised Him that He would save the world; and He was going to His death, with not one soul in all the world that understood or that believed; yet He went on unfalteringly. Where God led, there He would follow. And because of that undaunted faith of His, and that perfect obedience tested to the uttermost, He has destroyed our enemies, and won us our salvation. And in all history, perhaps, no act of any man comes nearer to His own than this uttermost sacrifice of Abraham, who gave his very all to a God who seemed faithless and discredited, climbing that other hill into that other darkness, with his hopes all shattered, and God's promises all broken, and his sore, lacerated heart pained all but past the bearing.

¶ 'No man, since the apostles' time, has rightly understood the legend of Abraham. The apostles themselves did not sufficiently extol or explain Abraham's faith, according to its worth and greatness. I much marvel that Moses so slightly remembers him.'<sup>1</sup>

3. 'So they went both of them together.' But—the father's heart was sorest in the common sorrow. And, to-day, has it come to be your turn to climb the hill of sacrifice, that long, hard hill that strains the heart and tires so cruelly? Something has happened; and the life that used to be so sunny has of a sudden become shivery and grey. No doubt you are meeting it bravely enough. Perhaps because you have acquired the art of leaving yourself absolutely in God's hands and have gained the peace and the serenity that come from that. Or perhaps it is only with a certain apathetic courage that accepts what cannot be helped. The thing has come, and there is nothing to be said. 'What does one do,' asks a character in

<sup>1</sup> Luther.



Lucas Malet's *Wages of Sin*, 'when all the best is taken away from one, when life has grown trivial, stunted, narrow? After a time, my dear, one lights a candle called Patience, and guides one's footsteps by that.'

Or perhaps it is with a heart struck cold and bitter, that can bear, but cannot understand how God could treat it thus; which may say never a word, but which is unbelieving and rebellious. Life was so happy until this fell suddenly out of the sky; and now everything is so different—life grown a thing to be endured, a burden to be carried with a panting and strained heart.

Yet, at least, you are not alone. Your Father is beside you; and the Father's heart is sorest. However lonely is the road, you have one sure Companion; however personal the sorrow, one other heart is bearing it along with you; for it is His yet more than yours. So you 'go both of you together' down to the cold heart of what is a common sorrow—but—the Father's heart is sorest.

Can I see another's woe  
And not be in sorrow too?  
Can I see another's grief  
And not seek for kind relief?  
No, no! never can it be!  
Never, never can it be!

Think not thou canst sigh a sigh  
And thy Maker be not nigh!  
Think not thou canst weep a tear  
And thy Maker be not near!

O! He gives to us His joy  
That our grief it may destroy;  
Till our grief is fled and gone,  
God doth sit by us and moan.

That is the very teaching of the Testament. It is a man of sorrows, one tired and aged before His time by the keenness of His sympathy, by ever entering into other people's troubles, by giving Himself without stint for their relief, whom the Gospels tell us is God's very image and His express likeness. Whatever else and more the Cross means, surely it means this—that Maeterlinck is wholly wrong in picturing God as sitting smiling on a sunny mountain, high above, and untouched by the woes and miseries of this uneasy earth. Not sitting smiling, and not lolling at ease on a sunny mountain-

side, but in the thick darkness at the very heart of the world's sorrows, bowed by a cross that even He could hardly carry, so grieved, so wounded, so heartbroken, there it is that we see God clearest, there that we understand what He is really like.

4. Moreover, it is in the light of this that we must read the Master's sufferings and death. There have been explanations of the Cross which almost break one's heart to read, and do they not break God's? Always when meditating on our Saviour's passion, let us begin by fastening on Paul's great words that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself,' or on those of the Gospel, 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son' for it—His foolish, blundering, heart-breaking world.

So, when the Master climbed His hill of sacrifice, He did not go alone, but there was One beside Him suffering in His suffering, even more than He Himself. So they went both of them together to the Cross and darkness—He and God—and the Father's heart was sorest. What it all must have meant to God no human heart can ever picture. To watch the scoffing and the mockery, the spitting and the buffeting, and make no sign—the dreadful things which He hid from us yonder in the darkness, and the long hours of waiting there amid that ribald, teasing, cruel mob, before at last death came. How terrible is the restraint of the Almighty, how fearful is His patience! 'Christ's atonement,' says Dr Dods, 'was nothing more than His quietly and lovingly accepting all that sin could do against Him.' And He was not alone in that; for God was hurt by what hurt Him, was wounded by His wounds, and He, too, quietly and lovingly accepted it.

¶ There is a painting in the National Gallery in London in which one sees Christ on the Cross against a black background. Darkness wraps Him in loneliness. He, and He only, loves enough to suffer and die. The universe is uncaring. But if one looks intently there emerges from the blackness the dim outline of another crucified Sufferer—the Father sharing Golgotha with His Son.<sup>1</sup>

Is not that the supreme meaning of the Cross, and its chief terror?—that our sins hurt God like that; that always He is wounded by them as our Lord was then; that it was not Christ

<sup>1</sup> H. S. Coffin, *The Meaning of the Cross*, 134.

only who climbed the grim, stony hill of sacrifice, and not Christ only who went down deeper and deeper through the darkness, but they went both of them together, the Father and He; and the Father's heart was sorest. Only at such a price, and such a cost, was our salvation won.

## The Leading of God

Gen. xxiv. 27.—'I being in the way, the Lord led me.'

THE story of the steward who went in search of a wife for Isaac and discovered Rebekah is one of the most lovely idylls in the Bible. These patient camels on the dusty plains—we can almost hear them as they go labouring heavily—that scene at sunset by the village well, and the women coming out to draw, and, above all, that trusted servant, so humble that we do not know his name, and yet so honoured that the bride he chose was to be the ancestress of the Messiah.

1. One thing stands out, and that is *the simple, unassuming faith of the nameless servant*. Having fulfilled his mission we read that he 'bowed down his head, and worshipped the Lord,' saying, 'Blessed be the Lord God of my master, Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of His mercy and His truth: I being in the way the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren.'

These words are the spontaneous expression of a simple but sublime trust in the guiding providence of Almighty God. Such trust is beautiful in its utter simplicity. Do not despise it because of that. The greatest truths of life are nearly always those which can be given simplest expression. It does not follow that because faith is thus simple it is not also profound. This old man was no theologian or philosopher. He had developed no body of well-thought-out consistent truths or beliefs concerning the ultimate things of life. He had never heard of the sovereignty or omnipotence, the omniscience or omnipresence, of God. Yet they are all implied in everything he did. He believed in God in these ways. His belief could be stated in these terms. For him, God was everywhere, and knew everything. This was his settled attitude to life. As some one has said, 'When life was simpler, faith reached the

sublimest heights.' The ancients knew something we ourselves have yet to learn. This man received the blessing and guidance of God just because he walked by faith. Those who walk that pathway will be sure to receive God's blessing.

¶ Mr F. S. Smythe, the mountaineer, in his little book entitled *The Spirit of the Hills*, says: 'Simplicity is the key to happiness.' Most certainly it is. And it is so in the realm of religious faith as well as elsewhere. After all, it is a greater thing to be a splendid believer than to be a clever doubter. Men are getting tired of mere cleverness. It is getting us nowhere. The clever fellows have had a long innings and they have brought our civilization to the edge of a fearful abyss. We must get back to the faith that, 'above all, in all, and through all' is God; that in Him all things live and move and have their being; that in this universe He is Sovereign, and that those who trust in Him shall never be confounded.

2. In the second place, *God leads and blesses us as we walk the way of duty*. That is the other great truth enshrined in this lovely old tale. After all, it was a rather strange task that had been allotted to him. When he set out on his quest to find a wife for Isaac he probably had no idea how it would end. Probably his mind was swept by doubts and fears. If so, he kept them to himself and plodded on. He had given his word. His master, Abraham, depended on him. If he failed—and failure was possible—then at least it could be said that he died in the way. But as he walked the path of duty he received the blessing of God.

'Not once or twice in our rough island-story, the path of duty has been the way to glory.' That is the way in which the poet puts it, thinking of signal and illustrious deeds. But it is not less true of the unnamed servant than of the conqueror at Waterloo that, being in the way, the Lord led him. We are here in the name of a better Lord than Abraham, who has allotted to each of us our duty. And we may be certain that along that highway, however dusty and dreary it may be, there lies the only road to what is beautiful. At the very heart of all our human story there is a cross leading to a crown. And in this strange world there is no way to any crown that is more than worthless tinsel but the long lone road where common



duty lies, and where the flints are often cutting to the feet.

¶ Bunyan tells us that there was easy going in Bypath Meadow, and that that was why the pilgrims thought to choose it. And so they climbed the fence and entered Bypath Meadow, and found it to be as fair as Paradise, and yet in a little they were in Doubting Castle and in the grip of the giant called Despair. There was many a weary mile upon the highway, but Giant Despair was not permitted on it. To meet with him they had to leave the road, and then they found he was not far away.

3. Again, *God leads us as we walk the way of Christ*. The great way of life for any man is to follow Jesus Christ. No one will ever be lost in the trackless plains of life who dares to follow Him. *He knows the way home*. His own words are, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life'; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.' That is His claim on behalf of Himself. Christianity was known in the first centuries of the Christian faith as '*The Way*,' and the earliest followers of Jesus were called 'Followers of the Way.' To follow Jesus—that is Christianity. To walk in His way is to walk through life in His spirit and by His power. It is the way of love, of purity, of sincerity, of humility, of truth. Perhaps it can be summed up in that one great word, '*love*,' for His last great command to His followers was that they should love one another as He had loved them. To walk through life in that spirit is to walk the way of Christ. It runs everywhere. It runs through our homes, our offices and businesses. It runs through every land. It is meant for all people. It touches and transforms all circumstances. Those who walk in it are sure of the leading and the crowning blessing of God!

¶ When George Cadbury died, one of his friends, Dr Cox, paid this tribute to his character: 'The greatest thing that can be said of him is that he increased the sum of love in the world.'

## The Added Touch

Gen. xxiv. 45, 46.—'And I said unto her, Let me drink, I pray thee. And she made haste, and let down her pitcher from her shoulder, and said, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: so I drank, and she made the camels drink also.'

JUST as there is a little touch that can make the most ordinary action beautiful, so is there a want of it that sends us away from some people with a shiver as we say to ourselves: 'We have had the letter of the law, but not a suggestion of grace.' This want is, as it has been aptly phrased, the added, or, 'extra touch.' Rebekah would have fulfilled all that was required of her in civility to a stranger had she simply complied with his request: 'I pray thee give *me* to drink.' The extra touch was in the gracious response with its accompanying action: I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking.

1. Making happiness for others does not depend upon a few big things done occasionally so much as upon the extra touch given to the little things which in the main make up the fabric of our life. How little this touch costs, yet what might there is in it. A line or two in a letter, a few words in a conversation—there are times when these have made for men a new heaven and a new earth! We cannot all do what are called great things, but we all can give the smaller things that mystic touch which brings them near to greatness. The thing that God gives us to do is the thing we can do; something which does not require a capital we cannot furnish of gift or of means. Our daily life can be made wonderfully effective by very little things. The light of the kindly spirit, which is a form of the heroic spirit, shines through the wrappings of education or the want of it, of dogma or surroundings, and reveals to us the beauty and power in the simple touch above and beyond what is expected of us. The Koran makes a distinct class of those who are by nature good, and whose goodness has an influence on others, and it pronounces this class to be the aim of religion. And this influence never translates itself to better purpose than through the disposition that breathes in these old words: 'Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also.'

¶ In his book *The Greatest Thing in the World*

Henry Drummond asks, 'Have you ever noticed how much of Christ's life was spent in doing kind things—in merely doing kind things?'

He did kind things so kindly—  
It seemed His heart's delight  
To make poor people happy,  
From morning until night.

2. Let us look a little further—at what this action meant to the *future* of this woman. Little she knew that the man who said to her, 'Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink,' was the trusted servant of the father of the faithful, the representative man of her race. Little did she dream when she answered, 'Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also,' that her answer was the sign he had asked from heaven, and which put upon her from that moment the seal of her high destiny. Humanly speaking, that added touch changed the whole direction of her life, giving her, in exchange for obscurity, the premier position among the women of her race, and a sure place in its marvellous history.

And the added touch did nothing for this woman of old time that it cannot do for us, if not in degree yet in kind. We never know what there is in any action we do, but of this we may be sure—there is *something*, and it never fails to report itself. As we give to the world, from the world we get. There are places where we do not come to our own; and just as our own is worth coming to, we can do without it in the sense of an outward recognition of it. Enough for us that we are the 'children of our Father which is in heaven,' who find their own in what they are rather than in what they have.

Taking life, however, on its more rough and utilitarian side, there are two things none of us can afford: one is to say of anything we do, 'It doesn't matter'; the other is to ask: 'Why should we do for others more than we are obliged to do? they will never thank us.' To slip into either of these fallacies is to bring ourselves, sooner or later, into inquest with the kind of lie which costs very dearly. To reduce our existence—for life it is not—to a miserable science of only 'looking after ourselves' is the most bitter and ironical form of self-defeat we can very well court.

Looking after ourselves in this sense is a fatal blunder even from a prudential standpoint. The world keeps no books; but it registers our

actions in imperishable memories and impressions. It has its day after to-morrow; and to neglect to make friends until we want them is about equal to the wisdom of postponing life until after our funeral. Wherever men recognize in us disinterested service, a genuine desire to make life happier for others, we do more than achieve influence or reward; we 'inherit it by a kind of spiritual reversion.'

¶ In the autobiography of the late Mr J. G. Witt, K.C., the eminent barrister gives an instance of the important result which followed a few kind words and a gift of an old coat. He writes: 'One day I was sitting at the extreme end of the row of the Junior Bar in the old Queen's Bench Court at Westminster. From a small window in the robing-room upstairs the whole of the bar could be seen. The managing clerk to a firm of solicitors, having in his hand a brief for counsel to move for rule *nisi*, went up to the robing-room and asked Mr Howard, the manager, whether he could tell him the name of a junior counsel to whom the brief could be delivered. Now Mr Howard had on his staff an attendant named "Ben," a very worthy man, to whom I had shown some trifling kindness, such as asking him about his health, and to whom I had given an old coat and a Christmas-box. Ben seized the clerk, led him to the window, pointed me out to him, and advised him to entrust the brief to me.'

3. And, once more, let us look at this action in what may be its meaning through us for the world of which we form part. 'What do ye more than others?' 'Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.' The world is only too well used to the regulation mile; and it is not impressed by doctrine or practice which gets its due credentials by being neither better nor worse than what is expected by the average religious life about us. But adorn the doctrine by the extra touch. Men expect the first mile; but, having done it, do another, and that arrests attention, gets hold of the imagination, and finds a sure way to the heart. We say we believe in Christ, and men listen, if listen they do, with indifference; but live Christ, and men love Him. Let us, therefore, seek for grace to show what wondrous power there is in every action which adds to the expected the surprise and beauty of the unexpected.



¶ A chaplain in the American Army during the Civil War was passing over the field when he saw a wounded soldier. He happened to have his Bible under his arm, and stooping down, said to the man, 'Would you like me to read you something from the Bible?' The wounded man said, 'I am so thirsty, I would rather have a drink of water.' The chaplain hurried away and brought the water. After the man had drunk it he said, 'Could you lift my head and put something under it?' The chaplain took off his overcoat and rolled it up, and, tenderly lifting the man's head, made the coat a pillow. 'Now,' said the man, 'if I had something over me! I am so cold.' The chaplain took off his coat and covered the man. Then the wounded man said, 'For God's sake, if there is anything in that book that makes a man do for another what you have done for me, let me hear it.'<sup>1</sup>

### The Quiet Man

Gen. xxiv. 63.—'And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide.'<sup>1</sup>

1. THIS is a quite typical incident—when the lively maid leaps from her camel into the life of this meditative man. The great possessions and experiences of life come to Isaac. He does not seek them. He does not win his bride. She comes to him across the desert, wooed and won for him by another. Isaac is the kind of man who needs to have things done for him. Esau must hunt for his venison, and Abraham's confidential servant must bring him his wife. The marriage is arranged.

It is so different from what we find in the life of Isaac's son. Jacob had to travel far and toil wearily to win the woman he loved. There was no possibility of arranging a marriage or anything else for Jacob; he was too fond of arranging things for himself. But Isaac was of another temper. We read this lively, lovely chapter, and confess that there is nothing like it in any literature. We see the aged patriarch laying his commands upon the servant he could trust. We follow the camels across the desert, and find them at last kneeling for water beside the village well, where Abraham's steward meets

the frank, active, generous girl, and settles in his heart that this is she. We watch with eager interest as this sagacious man pursues his happy quest, and wins a willing answer. But through it all we say, Where is Isaac—the man, as we think, who has the deepest stake in this adventure? That very night when the maid was won Isaac is five hundred miles away, at Beersheba—meditating in the field, at eventide.

So here they meet—Rebekah, eager and high-spirited, active, energetic, and decided; and Isaac, dreamy and retiring. Wherever we find Isaac, he is in presence of natures stronger and more active than his own. In his early days Ishmael is in the camp, the bold, imperious youth with the passionate blood of his gipsy mother. Isaac grows to manhood, overshadowed by the grand, heroic presence of Abraham. Even beside his own boys it is his weakness that is in evidence. So destitute of enterprise and energy himself, the bravery of Esau wakens in his eye the light of a father's fondness. He listens with delight to the evening tales—tales from the hills; and he loves the brave boy for all he could not be himself, while he almost fears the deep cunning and craft of Jacob. And, in this closest tie of all, Rebekah's quick intelligence, her alert, decided ways, and her strong will are too much for Isaac; and he comes to be managed, even outwitted, by her clever scheming. Take him anywhere, the contrast appears; and beside the strong, the brave, the clever, the enterprising, Isaac is evermore the same—a quiet, patient, much-enduring, meditative man.

2. Abraham—Isaac—Jacob. Abraham and Jacob are, each in his own way, great; but Isaac is in no way remarkable. Only a link between the other two, he serves to maintain the succession and keep things going.

And surely there is something to be thankful for here, that such a man should have a place in such a great succession. God has a place for the quiet man. It seems to be a law of our life that it goes forward in alternate periods of progress and of rest. Isaac is the rest between. There are times, not for progress, but for waiting; and Isaac is here, not to make any new departure, but just to keep and transmit the blessing; and a quiet man will do—sometimes *only* a quiet man will do.

<sup>1</sup> Clifford Bozeat.

Let us think of this quiet side of character as we find it here in Isaac. We may take it first as it suggests itself in the text, and then let it lead us on to other places in his life. Take it in three words—*meditative*, *patient*, *submissive*.

(1) *Meditative*.—‘Isaac went out to meditate in the field at eventide.’ He was living at his favourite haunt by the well of Lahai-roi, Hagar’s well. And we can see him on this evening before the day of his marriage, out from the tents all by himself, wandering and wondering, silently musing. About him the soft pastures and the gathering shadows and the hush of eventide—the ‘pastoral melancholy’; and the soul within in harmony with the peace that reigns around. This is the man. He has been called somewhat fancifully ‘the Wordsworth of the Old Testament,’ the solitary wandering away from the haunts of men to the sanctuary of Nature and the presence of God with a soul open to every impression.

There are many of us who are energetic enough through the day, but we do not close the day aright. We take our business and anxieties home with us, and we never know that happy hour when the worry of it all steals away. ‘Unquietness,’ says an old writer, ‘is the greatest evil that can come into the soul except sin.’ Restlessness is next to sin in the damage it does to the soul. We do not know how much we lose without this tranquil, receptive mood. We must be quiet to get the best impressions from the best thoughts and the best things—like the mountain-tarn whose unruffled surface takes into it the very heavens in their height. ‘Be still, my soul.’

¶ General Gordon writes to his sister, ‘Getting quiet does one good—it is impossible to hear God’s voice in a whirl of visits—you must be more or less in the “desert” to use the scales of the sanctuary, to see and weigh the true values of things.’

(2) *Patient*.—We never meet Isaac in positive and decided action. There is always a stronger presence, a more aggressive personality, a character more forcible before which he yields and endures. Even as a boy we see it—the gentle, laughing Isaac has no chance against Ishmael. As a son we see it—he gave to Abraham unbroken, unquestioning obedience. And in his own home his is still a secondary place. Boys like Esau and Jacob are soon more than a

match for such a father. Isaac is not the governing presence in his own tent. Always there is about him something patient and submissive.

But though this is often weak and pitiful, it is sometimes Christian and strong. There is a strength that is made perfect in such weakness; and the man who yields is stronger than the man who fights. ‘Blessed are the meek.’ Perhaps we see it best in the story of how the Philistines harassed him about his wells. When Isaac’s servants had bored through the hard limestone and found the sweet, springing water, there were those who were quick to envy them their good success. Round the well and for the well angry words might soon have turned to bloody strife, but Isaac draws his men away to seek another spring; and when this, too, becomes the scene of strife, he makes another move among the hills to find another well. And Isaac’s enemies at last were conquered by such kindness, by this strange magnanimity. It was a triumph gained not by strength but by character.

¶ A missionary tells how in South India a village man became a Christian. It roused his caste people to bitter enmity against him. They came and stole his harvest, reaping it at night. He came upon them while they were in the act and just fell down before them, beseeching them with folded hands to leave some of the precious grain for the sustenance of his family. They answered him by cutting off both his hands as he held them out in entreaty. That was their answer. What would his be to them? A summons to court? They expected it but none came. Many advised him to prosecute. But he refused. Christ had forgiven him. He would forgive his enemies for Christ’s sake. And so astonished were his enemies at this offensive of love, and so rebuked were they by it, that they restored his grain and, in an attempt at atonement, ploughed and sowed and reaped his fields since he was now handless and helpless.<sup>1</sup>

¶ The noblest kind of sacrifice is the self-denial of those who have the clearest rights. Isaac was again and again placed in circumstances in which others would have quickly drawn the sword. The question arises whether he surrendered too much for the sake of peace. If a man cannot waive his rights without neglecting his duty, violating his conscience, surrendering his religion, losing his self-respect, betraying

<sup>1</sup> G. T. Bellhouse.



the rights of others, he is bound to resist. Otherwise he may yield, and scarcely any price is too high to pay for peace. Isaac was right. He is the first example in the Old Testament of the Christian or New Testament type of excellence.<sup>1</sup>

(3) *Submissive*.—This side of Isaac's character comes to its highest in the story of Mount Moriah. As we read the chapter, we are so taken up with Abraham that we often forget the splendid part that Isaac played that day. They went, both of them together, climbing the mountain-track side by side and step by step, going up the altar stairs—priest and victim. They had gone before, but always Abraham had taken a lamb; and Isaac's wondering question pierced him to the heart, 'Where is the lamb?' How the awful secret was told him we may not know. But there was no remonstrance or resistance. The strong youth might easily have escaped; but as he had carried the wood, like Christ, so, like Him, too, he suffered himself to be bound and laid upon the rude altar. With what courage and simple trust and patient resignation he made himself a willing sacrifice—that deepest note in his nature, that willingness to yield in silence to the will of another, coming to this lofty moment when he bows to the will of his father and his father's God, ready to die, closing his eyes at the flash of the uplifted knife, splendidly submissive.

Is it not always true that the highest faith is surrender, and the noblest life is sacrifice. We cannot fill the place God is keeping for us, or do the work God is laying to our hand, or inherit the blessing God is preparing for us—we cannot enter into life as God wants our life to be, except by obedience. 'Not my will, but thine be done.'

If a man is good at all, at some point of his life he becomes evidently Christ-like, for all good is in Him. It is Christ who has saved for us this gentler side of character, and revealed to us its hidden strength and real glory; and if we have no sympathy with this kind of thing—if we see only the weakness and the softness of it, then we are away from the mind of Christ altogether. It is His peculiar service to remind us of the greatness of the lowly and the meek and the patient. The road by which He travelled is marked, like Isaac's, by the places where He thought and

prayed, by the wells where He would not strive, and by the altar where He suffered.

## Esau

Gen. xxv. 32.—'And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?'

1. ESAU's good qualities are very evident. They are of the kind easily recognized and easily popular among men—the typical sportsman who is only a sportsman, bold and frank and free and generous, with no intricacies of character, impulsive and capable of magnanimity, the very opposite of the prudent, dexterous, nimble man of affairs, rather reckless indeed and hot-blooded and passionate. His virtues are already, we see, dangerously near to being vices. Being largely a creature of impulse, he was in a crisis the mere plaything of animal passion, ready to satisfy his desire without thought of consequences. Without self-control, without spiritual insight, without capacity even to know what spiritual issues were, judging things by immediate profit and material advantage, there was not in him depth of nature out of which a really noble character could be cut. This damning lack of self-control comes out in the text, the transaction of the birthright. Coming from the hunt hungry and faint, he finds Jacob cooking porridge of lentils and asks for it. The sting of ungovernable appetite makes him feel as if he would die if he did not get it. Jacob takes advantage of his brother's appetite and offers to barter his dish of pottage for Esau's birthright.

There would be some superstition in the minds of both of them as to the value of the birthright. Both of them valued it as a vague advantage, carrying with it a religious worth, but it meant nothing tangible; and here was Esau's temptation, terribly strong to a man of his fibre. He was hungry, and before his fierce desire for the food actually before him such a thing as a prospective right of birth seemed an ethereal thing of no real value. If he thought of any spiritual privilege the birthright might be supposed to confer, it was only to dismiss the thought as not worth considering. Spiritual values had not a high place in his standard of things. He

<sup>1</sup> J. Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, ii. 26.

feels he is going to die, as a man of his type is always sure he will die if he does not get what he wants when the passion is on him; and supposing he does die, it will be poor consolation that he did not barter this intangible and shadowy blessing of his birthright. 'Behold I am at the point to die; and what profit shall this birthright do to me?'

2. The Bible writers speak of Esau always with a certain contempt, and with all our appreciation of his good, natural qualities, his courage and frankness and good-humour, we cannot help sharing in the contempt. The man who has no self-control, who is swept away by every passion of the moment, whose life is bounded by sense, who has no appreciation of the higher and larger things which call for self-control, that man is after all only a superior sort of animal, and not always so very superior at that. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews calls Esau 'a profane person who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.' 'Profane' means not blasphemous but simply *secular*, a man who is not touched to finer issues, judging things by coarse, earthly standards, without spiritual aspiration or insight, feeling every sting of flesh keenly, but with no sting of soul towards God. Bold and manly and generous, and with many splendid constitutional virtues, he may be, but the man himself lacks susceptibility to the highest motives of life. He is easily bent by every wind of impulse, and is open without defence to animal appetite. He is capable of despising the intangible blessing of such a thing as a birthright, even though he feels it to be a holy thing, because he cannot withstand present need. A profane, a secular person, as Esau, is the judgment of the New Testament.

¶ Civilization ought to have some power in inhibiting impulses; but the fact remains that amongst the highest as well as the lowest there have been conspicuous examples of selling the birthright for a savoury meal. For the sake of a bodily indulgence people have cut themselves off from the higher possibilities of their nature; for a sensual pleasure they have forfeited those finer rewards which come to the morally strong. Shakespeare has given us a type of such splendid failures in Mark Antony, the compelling orator, the victorious general, who could not resist the seductions of Cleopatra, and drifted back again

and again to Egypt, while his less brilliant but harder-fibred rival, Octavius, won from him empire and glory.

This scene where Esau surrendered his birthright did not settle the destiny of the two brothers—a compact like this could not stand good for ever, and in some magical way substitute Jacob for Esau in the line of God's great religious purpose. But this scene, though it did not settle their destiny in that sense, revealed their character, the one essential thing which was necessary for the spiritual succession to Abraham; and Esau failed here in this test as he would fail anywhere. His question to reassure himself, 'What profit shall this birthright do to me?' reveals the bent of his life, and explains his failure. True self-control means willingness to resign the small for the sake of the great, the present for the sake of the future, the material for the sake of the spiritual, and that is what faith makes possible. Of course Esau did not think he was losing the great by grasping at the small. At the moment the birthright, just because it was distant, appeared insignificant. He had no patience to wait, no faith to believe in the real value of anything that was not material, no self-restraint to keep him from instant surrender to the demand for present gratification.

This is the power of all appeal to passion—that it is *present*, with us now, to be had at once. This is temptation, alluring to the eye, whispering in the ear, offering satisfaction now. Here and now—not hereafter; this thing, that red pottage there—not an ethereal unsubstantial thing like a birthright. What is the good of it if we die? and we are like to die if we do not get this gratification the senses demand. In the infatuation of appetite all else seems small in comparison; the birthright is a poor thing compared with the red pottage.

But it is not merely lack of self-control that Esau displays by the question of the text. It is also lack of appreciation of spiritual values. In a vague way he knew that the birthright meant a religious blessing, and in the grip of his temptation that looked to him as purely a sentiment, not to be seriously considered as on a par with a material advantage. The profane man, the secular man, may not be just a creature of impulse, he may have his impulses in good control, but he has no place for what is unseen. He asks naturally, What shall it



profit? Men who judge by the eye, by material returns only, who are frankly secular, think themselves great judges of profit, and they, too, would not make much of a birthright if it meant only something sentimental, as they would call it. The real and not the ideal, the actual and not the visionary, the thing seen and not the thing unseen—they would not hesitate more than Esau over the choice between the pottage and the birthright. They judge by substance, and do not understand about the faith which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

3. How easy it is for all of us to drift into the class of the profane, the secular, persons as Esau; to have our spiritual sensibility blunted; to lose our appreciation of things unseen; to be so taken up with the means of living that we forget life itself and the things that alone give it security and dignity! How easy, when soul wars with sense, to depreciate everything that is beyond sense, and let the whole moral tone be relaxed!

We, too, can despise our birthright, by living far below our privileges, and far below our spiritual opportunities. We have our birthright as sons of God, born to an inheritance as joint-heirs with Christ. We belong by essential nature not to the animal kingdom, but to the Kingdom of Heaven; and when we forget it and live only with reference to the things of sense and time, we are *disinheriting* ourselves as Esau did. The secular temptation strikes a weak spot in all of us, suggesting that the spiritual life, God's love and holiness, the Kingdom of Heaven and His righteousness, the life of faith and prayer and communion are dim and shadowy things, as in a land that is very far off. 'What profit shall this birthright do to me?'

What shall it profit? seems a sane and sensible question, to be considered in a business-like fashion. It is the right question to ask, but it has a wider scope and another application. What profit the mess of pottage if I lose my birthright? What profit the momentary gratification of even imperious passion if we are resigning our true life, and losing the clear vision and the pure heart? What profit the easy self-indulgence, if we are bartering peace and love and holiness and joy? 'What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world (and not

merely a contemptible mess of pottage) and lose his own soul?'

There is a text, or else a saying,  
Somewhere, I don't remember where,  
That if you gained the whole wide world,  
But lost yourself, your gain were but  
A withered flower, a cloven skull,  
That is the text—or something like it;  
And that remark is sober truth.<sup>1</sup>

### Altar, Tent and Well

Gen. xxvi. 25.—'And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well.'

WITHIN the four corners of this verse, which sets forth the experience of one in all points like ourselves, we may find an indication of the Divinely willed elements in a complete life. Pick out the three centres here, where the threads cross, and they are these, the *altar*, the *tent*, the *well*. There we see focused sharply, and gathered up, the main constituents or impulses which are always to be found in the life of a man after God's own heart; and, without being unduly imaginative or fantastic, we may decide that they stand for *religion*, *home*, and *work*.

1. *Religion*.—Isaac, we are told, 'builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the Lord.' In the history of the patriarchs this brief notice of the erection of an altar is almost a standing formula. The Pilgrim Fathers, when they stepped on the savage shores of the New World, provided first for the house of God, it is related, before lavishing expense on their own homes; and in this they had the far-off saints of Genesis for model.

Isaac got his religion from his father, and now and then, perhaps, the question may arise whether, if he had had to make a venture like Abraham's for his belief, it might not have gone hard with him. Perhaps it might; but God gives to every man his own task. All are not pioneers, like Columbus; and if to us grace comes, as well it may, like an heirloom, almost, of the family, then our reasons for gratitude are all the deeper, and in the fact we should feel a

<sup>1</sup> Ibsen, *Peer Gynt*.

sharp spur inciting us to guard with double care the treasure that is passing through our hands.

Perhaps the altar might be reared on the very spot which heathen natives had kept as a place of sacrifice—the first step in that long process of cleansing the soil which ultimately turned Canaan into a Holy Land for God's ransomed people. This thing is a parable. Life needs altars, if it is to be cleansed, and set apart, and made fit for the Divine service and indwelling. That is true about all life, be it social or individual. Quench the altar-flame in a city or a country; put out the fire of faith and devotion; destroy the influence of religion, and in twenty years society will fall to pieces by its own rottenness.

¶ Once, when some one had been airing cheap scepticism in his hearing, Russell Lowell said: 'Show me ten square miles in any part of the world, outside of Christianity, where the life of man and the honour of woman are safe, and I can bring up my children decently, and I will emigrate there and give up religion.'

This holds good still more obviously of the life of the individual. Apart from the fact—though it is a fact easily forgotten—that God demands faith and obedience from every man; apart from this the life with no religion in it is a poor, stunted, undeveloped thing. Without that, we may widen our experience by art or culture as we please, but to the end it will be a thing of irretrievably narrow limits, for it will lack the third dimension, which gives depth and height. Besides, as we know who have seen the underside of life's web, the man without faith, whose altar has never yet been built or kindled, is choosing to dwell unprotected amid pestilences and miasmas of moral evil.

At this point let us urge a very simple lesson. It is noteworthy that wherever Isaac had a tent he saw to it that God had an altar. In other words, we should take religion with us wherever we go. Doubtless the environment will be hostile sometimes; but what is religion for, if it is to quench its flame meekly at the faintest breeze of opposition? Isaac must have found himself, often, among Canaanites and Philistines to whom his altars and prayers were an object of detestation; yet, easy though we think him, he could be stiff enough when it was a question of serving the Lord God of his fathers.

¶ A generation ago a sturdy English yeoman

emigrated with his family to Australia, and settled on a small sheep 'station.' His nearest neighbour was ten miles off, but the 'squatters' thought nothing of riding twenty or even forty miles to a central barn to spend the week-end in drinking and gambling. When it came to be the newcomer's turn to entertain, he sent his two sons round the circuit with this message: 'Father invites you for Saturday and Sunday as usual. There will be no cards or liquor; only a quiet talk about old England and the welfare of our district.' He did not expect a single guest, but one after the other rode up, till the whole section was represented. 'With mother opposite him,' relates one of the sons, 'father said grace at table. That night the men talked long about bushmen, and rabbits, and fences, and drought, and how to stand by each other. The next morning, as he did every Sunday morning, father conducted prayers, this time before fifty of the roughest men I had ever seen assembled, and the singing of hymns was broken by sobs and tears. When they parted, my father, though a recent comer, was the acknowledged leader of the community.'<sup>1</sup>

2. *Home*.—'Isaac pitched his tent there.' His tent—an emblem, surely, of the changeable existence man is called to lead. Now this transiency of mortal things is one aspect of the truth, needful to be thought upon and never quite forgotten without loss. It is unspeakably important that we Christians should cultivate a detached spirit in regard to things seen; enjoying the good gifts of God—yes! enjoying them, and thanking Him for them all—but not afraid at the thought of letting go. If, as Robert Barbour used to say, 'like the Jacobite, our King too is over the water,' our home cannot be here.

¶ Practically everything of real value to them was burnt. Later, Goforth tried to comfort his wife by saying, 'My dear, do not grieve so. After all, they're *just things*.'<sup>2</sup>

Yet this is only one aspect of the whole fact. Doubtless the tent was frail and transitory, yet all the time it was a home. Round that little shed of canvas clustered Isaac's dearest hopes. To him it was the focus of experience. So it cannot be that we should in any sense forget the priceless worth of home, merely because,

<sup>1</sup> E. Herman, *The Touch of God*, 115.

<sup>2</sup> Rosalind Goforth, *Goforth of China*.



like other sweet human things, it changes, and is for this world alone. Is not the Church itself, in one aspect, for this world only, and, it may be, the Bible too? Yet they are all God's inestimable gifts; and it is as we use such Divine elements in the life that now is, that we declare our fitness to live again.

But let us pass on from home life as it is in itself to what is more distinctive of the life drawn for us here. The mark of this home was its steadfast proximity to the symbol of religion. Think of the transience of 'home.' A few ropes and pins loosened, and the tent sinks to the ground. So it is with men, with the places of abode we mortals build and fill with love and happy peace. The loss of health, the progress of years, commercial adversity, the shame of sin—ah! sometimes the floods of death; any one of them all may sap the foundations in a moment, and lay the whole in ruins. 'So fast we flit; such shadows we are, and such shadows we pursue.' Yet into this transitoriness there is one thing that can bring permanence and eternity, and that is union with God. The man of the tent is the prey of time, and passes; the man of the altar endures for ever. Religion has in it that which is superior to time. And in the same way, if only the sacred ties and dear associations of home are knit firm by prayer and faith, it will be proved that over them also time and death have no power, and that the best and holiest that are in them pass on with us, when we pass.

How, then, is that pervasion of home life by the spirit of religion to be realized? Well, part of the answer stands before our eyes. We speak of the family altar, in a phrase that to-day is metaphor; yet once on a time, as we see, it was no metaphor, but a description of real fact, of something that bore sensible witness to a steady faith in the unseen. How many of us are careful to keep that fire alight with its flame of daily worship?

¶ Sir Henry Jones speaking of Welsh village families whom he had known in his youth says: 'Their homes were sacred with the daily prayers offered in them morning and evening, and sometimes at mid-day; and their knowledge of the Bible was marvellous.'<sup>1</sup>

¶ The religious training, which was characteristic of the average American home a generation ago, performed one very mundane

function: It set standards. They were usually pretty black-and-white standards, of right and wrong, good and evil. These standards were usually challenged by youth itself during adolescence. They were reviewed in the light of experience afterward, and usually modified. But one thing was characteristic of this training. It urged upon the young, from earliest childhood, the concept that life had meaning, that life was a Gift of God, and that every one of God's creatures had the duty of perfecting himself in the image of some standard.

This was a duty that one had to one's self and to God, and it was necessary to fulfill it regardless of whether the effort was ever attended by 'success,' in the worldly sense. It was the path by which one achieved, not success, but happiness and the respect of one's fellows.<sup>1</sup>

3. *Work.*—'There Isaac's servants digged a well.' Of the detail that the well was dug by Isaac's servants nothing need be said; everything was done, in those days, by families or households. The servants, doubtless, had also pitched the tent and built the altar. The point rather is that now there emerges the third element in full, true life; for Isaac and his servants were great flock-masters, and the provision of water was one of the first duties of their calling.

To overestimate the value of sound, honest work, alike for our relations to God and man, is quite impossible. The idle man, as a thousand voices tell us daily, is gambling with his family happiness and his children's character; for idleness is the most unfailing symptom, as well as the constant feeder, of that all-devouring selfishness against which no domestic welfare can stand. And it is a truism that the idler cannot serve God. He has nothing with which to serve. The means, to his sin and shame, are lacking. The altar means *sacrifice*; and for that he has no contrite heart, no energy of purpose, no money that has cost him anything. On the other hand, no element in all the Christian experience goes more directly to fit men for the high fellowship of God or the pure felicity of home than the strain, the discipline, the long education of worthy and honest toil.

Religion, home, work—he who keeps faith with God in these three parts of life inherits true power and nobleness in the kingdom that

<sup>1</sup> *Old Memories*, 13.

<sup>1</sup> Dorothy Thompson.

abides. Mark the order Isaac followed, for it is the right one—God first, happiness second ; the tent a slight thing of little intrinsic worth, the altar built of solid and enduring stone. Let this be the relation we also maintain between the two, and in the end God will give us according to our choice ; when the earthly house of this tabernacle—this tent—is dissolved, a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

### When God becomes Real

Gen. xxviii. 11, 12, 13.—‘ And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set ; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven : and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it.’

1. AN experience like that which came to Jacob at Bethel, an experience which made him so tremendously aware of God that the very place on which he lay seemed the actual gate of heaven, that kind of experience comes only as the way is prepared for it. It may seem to happen quite casually, but it does not. It happens only as the atmosphere is right.

(1) To begin with, Jacob at Bethel was in *the right place* for a vital experience of God. He was, that is to say, in the wilderness, far from the haunts of men, far from the noise of the towns, far from the cries of the streets ; and he was there alone. This is always the first requirement in those who would find God, that they make time to be alone and to be still. But this is just what to-day so many refuse to do. So many seem unable to be still. So many seem to have lost the art of being alone. Always must they feel others about them. Positive discomfort descends upon them if they are left by themselves. And the result is they hear no heavenly voices. ‘ Oh, your voices, your voices,’ says the Dauphin to Joan in Mr Bernard Shaw’s play, ‘ Why don’t the voices come to me ? I am king, not you.’ And Joan replies, ‘ They do come to you ; but you do not hear them. You have not sat in the field in the evening listening for them. When the angelus rings you cross yourself and have done with it ; but if you prayed from your heart, and listened to the

thrilling of the bells in the air after they stop ringing, you would hear the voices as well as I do.’

¶ Baron von Hügel once wrote to his niece : ‘ I want to prepare you, to organize you for life, for illness, crisis and death. . . . Live all you can—as complete and full a life as you can find—do as much as you can for others. Read, work, enjoy—love and help as many souls—do all this. Yes—but remember : Be alone, be remote, be away from the world, be desolate. Then you will be near God !’

If Jacob’s experience of God is to be ours, a first rule to be observed, then, is that we frequent the solitary place. And we can do it by making time each day, perhaps in our own room, perhaps through a visit to a Church, perhaps through a morning or an evening walk, to be alone, to be still and listen. Cooped up in the Antarctic in the narrow space of that little ship, the *Discovery*, Dr Edward Wilson kept alive his sense of God by each day climbing up into the crow’s-nest, and there being alone and listening.

(2) Jacob at Bethel was in the right place for an experience of God. He was also lying on *the right kind of pillow*. For pillow he had nothing but a few of the hard stones of that bleak hill-side. Yet, strange as it may seem, that has always been the kind of pillow which has induced men’s profoundest experiences. It is true to say that all the great visions of which we have any record have visited those who, in the meantime, have had little more than a rough stone on which to lay their heads. Carlyle’s dictum that all true thought, all deep insight, are the daughters of pain, are born out of the black whirlwind, is sober truth. He wrote those words in his essay on Dante, and they are in the nature of a comment on Dante’s whole life. Dante dreamed his immortal dream when he had little but a stone for his pillow. An exile from his own home and country, he was wandering from place to place and patron to patron, proving ‘ how hard is the path.’ And if we come nearer our own day and think of him who saw Jacob’s ladder ‘ pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross’ and ‘ Christ walking on the water not of Gennesareth, but Thames,’ when did Francis Thompson see his vision ? When he was selling matches in the Strand for a living and sleeping under Thames bridges at night.



It would seem, then, that another requirement for a vision of God is a certain hardness in one's pillow. When that pillow becomes too soft, when people become too comfortable, the vision would seem to fade. Is it not the case with many people that an increase in their material comfort has meant a corresponding decrease in their sensitiveness to the spiritual?

¶ Not long before he died, Arnold Bennett, irritated by the disparaging 'reviews' which some of the younger literary critics were giving his later books, challenged those same critics to state clearly the nature of their complaint against him. And one of them replied, 'Our complaint against you, Arnold Bennett, is that you've grown too rich. When you were poor and struggling, then you felt deeply and saw truly. But now that success has come your way, your vision has become blurred and your books shallow and trivial.'

'I hate luxury,' wrote Goethe, 'it destroys the imagination.' It destroys the soul, too. A wise man then, a man who would keep his hold upon God, will always see to it that no matter what his outward circumstances, there will always be a certain austerity in his daily living; will always see to it that he has on hand some task which stretches all his powers; will always see to it, in other words, that somewhere in his pillow there is a piece of hard stone.

(3) Jacob was also in what we can only call *the right mood*. Recall why it was he had come to that hillside at all. He had, a day or two before, deliberately deceived his father, Isaac. He had disguised himself as his elder brother, Esau, and the half-blind old father had been taken in by the disguise, and had given to him the inheritance which really should have been his brother's. As a result, Esau had sought to slay him, and Jacob had been compelled to flee for his life and set out for another land. It was on the first night of that journey to the new land that he came to Bethel and dreamed his dream. And it is not difficult to imagine his mood as that night he sought to settle himself for sleep. His conscience would be beginning to get active. No longer would he be able to ward off a deep sense of shame for the shabby trick he had played. More and more would he become conscious of that awful sense of loneliness, of separation from God and one's fellows, which sin invariably brings. It would be not only night without. It would be also

night within. And it was then—then, when the deeps had been opened up in Jacob's nature, when life had brought him face to face with ultimate things, with sin, with the perilousness of life, with the deceitfulness of the human heart, with the inexorableness of the moral law—it was then, when Jacob was in that kind of mood, that God spoke.

God is ever near to the souls that need Him most; and a man never needs him so much as when he has sinned, for he is never so surely imperilled as then. So, through this man who sinned, to all men who have sinned this incident speaks, and tells us that God appears in grace to a man who has done wrong, to prevent his doing further wrong, to show that he is not cast off, that from the sin into which he has fallen there is a way to God, and that heavenly influences descend even on the head of the transgressor.

2. It says much for Jacob that in the light of common day he holds fast by the vision. The ladder and the angels and the voice are all part of the night's experience. But he does not try to shake them out of his mind. He does not say they are such stuff as dreams are made of. On the contrary, he knows that a great spiritual experience has befallen him, and he hastens to make a permanent and visible memorial of it. The place is sacred for ever where God meets a man, and that meeting is the one thing in life worth erecting a monument to celebrate. It says much for Jacob that he desires to catch and fix a passing experience, never to forget or lose sight of the fact that God has met and spoken with him, so he straightway consecrates the spot, and names it the House of God.

There is a church in Paris whose walls are covered with little marble tablets recording the dates when certain blessings came to certain persons—a church of memorials of mercy. It would be well if we could make some memorial of the goodness of God, of our own resolves, something that we could go back to or turn aside to in after days. It might accuse us and condemn us, but even so the experience would be wholesome and beneficial, and serve as a corrective to our present tendency to drift.

¶ Samuel Hadley, the founder of the great Water Street Mission in New York, found his God one April the 23rd in a lonely prison cell, and ever afterwards on that date he got per-

mission to make a pilgrimage to that same cell and quietly live through the same saving experience again. So he helped to keep vivid his sense of God and remained true to it to the end.

## The Ladder of Prayer

Gen. xxviii. 12.—‘Behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven.’

IN some of our devotional and mystic writers we read of what is called the ladder of prayer. Prayer is regarded as the ascent to God, up which, step by step, the soul is borne. And these devotional and mystic writers, often with great power and penetration, dwell on the separate steps of the ascent that carry the heart upward to the throne. In other words, they show where prayer begins, and to what heights it is capable of rising. They trace its stages, not by formal logic, but by the large experience of men.

1. Prayer commonly begins with the cry of escape from some external evil. The lowest step on the ladder of the soul is the cry wrung from disaster or adversity. When a man is faced with a dangerous operation, when he finds himself in dire peril, when some one who is very dear to him is ill, or in a situation of great hazard, then there is an instinct of the heart which urges to a cry for help from God, and it is in such a cry that prayer is often born.

¶ ‘I hadn’t prayed in ten years,’ Dr Fosdick heard a railwayman exclaim when his train had just escaped a serious accident, ‘but I prayed *then*.’

¶ Here is an entry in Robinson Crusoe’s journal on the island: ‘June 21. Very ill, frightened almost to death with the apprehensions of my sad condition, to be sick and no help. Prayed to God for the first time since the storm off Hull, but scarce knew what I said or why; my thoughts being all confused.’

The Scriptures preserve for us a vast store of prayers of this initial kind. The Bible is the great record of the soul and such prayers are *not* for blessings of the soul. They are wrung out, not in spiritual darkness, but in some bodily or temporal distress. And yet the Bible is so superbly human in its handling of this life

of ours, that it is a very treasury of prayers which some would scarcely reckon prayers at all. It does not ignore them because they are untouched by the deep sense of spiritual alienation. It does not rule them out of the soul’s history, because there is in them yet no plea for pardon. It knows our frame—remembers we are dust—is touched like the Lord with the feeling of our infirmities. It welcomes the strong cry, and calls it prayer, that is uttered in disaster and adversity.

2. That, then, is the first step on the ladder, and now above it there is another step. It is the stage when prayer for outward help becomes a cry for deliverance from sin. In the first outbreak of appeal to heaven there is scarcely any consciousness of sin. There is no thought of anything but the calamity which has befallen us or some one who is dear. But slowly, as a man prays for help, there steals on him the strange conviction that he needs something deeper than assistance, and that in the sight of God he is a sinner. It is thus that prayer, in the ordering of God, rises to what is called the second stage. Born in the need of help in some dark hour, it passes onward to the need of pardon. It deepens into prayer for forgiveness; for the inward cleansing of the heart; for deliverance, through the grace of God, from the sin that doth so easily beset us.

How often our Lord sought to deepen prayer after this fashion. He took prayer by the hand, so to speak, and led it upward to this higher step. Men came to Him and asked for something physical; Christ lent a willing ear to them, and answered them. They asked for sight, and Jesus gave them sight; they asked for bodily health, and He bestowed it. But how often when He bestowed such gifts—when He answered the prayer for outward things like these—He turned the thought of the sufferer to *sin*. ‘Go,’ He would say to them, ‘and sin no more.’ Was it merely a word of warning for the future? We do not exhaust the thought of Jesus when we narrow it in any way like that. He was leading men into that deeper life which can never be satisfied with outward blessings, but which feels, in the very bestowal of such benefits, the need of pardon and release from sin.

3. And now we pass on to the third stage in



the upward progress of the life of prayer, for we come to find that deliverance is not everything if we are to walk in well-pleasing before God. Our Saviour spoke of a house that was swept and garnished, and yet it became the dwelling-place of devils. If it was to be the home of light and love, it needed something more than cleansing. And so do men waken, when they have prayed for pardon, to their abiding need of something more than pardon. There are virtues that they must achieve. There are graces that they must attain. Patience is needed, and courage, and control, if they are to walk in the light as He is in the light. And so prayer rises from the cry for pardon into the range and compass of petition, and becomes the daily appeal of the endeavouring soul for needed virtue and for needed grace. It is true that our Father knows what things we need, before one syllable of prayer has left the lip. But Christ, who told us that, has told us also that the Father delights to have His children asking. And the fact is that in such holy mysteries there is little to be gained by argument; it is far wiser, in a childlike trust, to accept the perfect leadership of Jesus.

¶ There is a story told of a little child who was dangerously ill. One day the mother came into the bedroom and noticed the child's hand lying open, as if to receive something. She asked him what it meant, and back came the answer in a whisper: 'I can't think, Mummy, what to pray, so I just put my hand there. God will see it, and He knows what I want.'<sup>1</sup>

4. There is one common element in all the prayer-stages we have mentioned. Sometimes with far more insistence than at other times, there is felt, in every approach to God, the presence, if not the pressure, of the self. Now the question is: Is there no prayer possible where self shall be utterly forgotten? Is there no prayer where the very thought of self shall be lost and hidden and absorbed in God? If there be such, then prayer is at its highest, and we have reached the topmost step upon the ladder, which rises from the Bethel where we rest, and reaches to the glory of the throne.

The answer is, such prayer is not only possible, but is within the grasp of every one of us. It is born when a man has learned to look to God, and to say with his whole heart, 'Thy will be

done.' There is no longer any thought of *our* will; our will is merged in the sweet will of God. Through light and shadow, gladness and adversity, the perfect will of God is being wrought. And so each day, not choosing for ourselves, we take what God in His infinite wisdom sends us, and our life becomes a prayer, 'Thy will be done.' We do not ask to see the distant scene now. We do not blindly insist on *this* or *that*. We have ceased to think that we know what we most need. We have ceased to think we can direct our steps. Through all that is sent to us, and all we have to do, our one prayer is, 'Thy will be done.'

There may be many a struggle before that stage is reached. There was a struggle for Jesus before that stage was reached—'If it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.' But *when* it is reached, then there is perfect peace, and a new light on everything that happens; and self, which even in our petitions vexed us, passes in music out of sight. *That* is the highest reach of prayer, when it is grasped in the fullness of its meaning. That is something nobler than petition. It is communion with the Father of all spirits. It is the voicing of the passion to obey, whether obedience be hard or pleasant, and without obedience there can be no religion.

¶ 'I think,' wrote George Tyrrell, 'that as we understand things better we pray less and less for temporal benefits or even for miraculous providences of any sort, and trust ourselves rather to the "determinism," which, harsh and ruthless though it seems, is but the will of Him whose wisdom reaches from end to end and disposes of all things sweetly. We begin with "If it be possible, let the Chalice pass," and end with "Since it may not pass, Thy will be done." Though God condescends to the simpler faith, I cannot doubt but that the stronger pleases Him better, the faith of Job or of Christ.'

It is Christ who has made it possible, even for the weakest, to reach this highest stage of prayer. If God were an unknown ruler in the distance, only a hero could pray, 'Thy will be done.' If He were but a Spirit of omnipotence, such prayer would take far stronger faith than ours. But Christ has taught us that God is our Heavenly Father, and that He loves us with a perfect love, and that the very hairs of our head are numbered. Given a character of God

<sup>1</sup> W. H. Murray Walton, *Everybody's Prayer*, 45.

like *that*, it is not impossible to pray, 'Thy will be done.' We pray in the childlike and Christ-given confidence that in the will of God there is our highest good. And there we leave it, not seeing what it means, perhaps, for now we know in part and see in part; but quietly certain that the day is coming when we shall say 'He hath done all things well.'

## Tradition and Experiment

Gen. xxviii. 13.—'I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father.'

Heb. xi. 16.—'But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God.'

1. WHENEVER a new idea comes into the world it divides men into two camps. There are those who are attracted by it, and those who are afraid of it. On the one hand it finds a welcome response, and on the other a strong resistance. So it happens that in every branch of life there are conservatives and radicals. There are those who want to cling to the past, and those who are impatient to move beyond it to something fresh; those who desire to see life governed by precedent, and those who are all for progress. It is represented by the age-long conflict between youth and age, which has proved so fertile a theme to the novelist and dramatist. But it is more than a matter of the stage that we have reached in life. It is also a matter of temperament, and perhaps to some extent of training. Our minds are built in such a way that each of us leans in one direction or the other. There is, therefore, a constant tension between the mind that prefers to cling to the old ways, authenticated by the hall mark of tradition, and the mind that longs for experiment. It crops up in business, where some rely on the well-tested methods of the past, while others are impatient for new blood, fresh ideas, and every device that will help to keep abreast of the times. It echoes through the controversies of various schools of the world of art, leading one section to characterize those who disagree with them as old-fashioned, and causing them in turn to be subjected to the retort that they are ridiculous. It runs through politics everywhere, creating a left wing and a right wing, and even issuing in such sub-divisions as radical conservatives and conservative radicals.

2. It is not surprising that this same differentiation should have its effect in religion. It is reflected in the two texts we are considering. To the mind of Jacob God comes out of the past, associated with the faith of his fathers and the legacy he inherits from them. But to the writer to the Hebrews, God has been the God of this very Abraham, because the patriarch was an adventurous soul. God was not ashamed to have His name bound up with this man and his restless seeking spirit, his desire for something better, his faith and daring that made him look to the far horizon and its promise.

All religion is marked by the same divergence of type in its followers. It expresses itself in the clash of fundamentalist and modernist. One man swears by the verities in the expression given to them by an earlier age, whether in creed or symbol. Another conceives of his faith as that which makes him a rebel against the past, bidding him create a new order of things, and find a new setting for the truths of the eternal world. Which then produces the truer type of religion? Which is most in harmony with the mind and spirit of Christ? The answer lies in the discovery that each has its place, and that the true strength of life comes from a faith that incorporates the worth of both. In the Bible God is represented as coming to men through the things that the centuries have unfolded. He is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. He is made known to Israel in the unfolding history of the nation. He declares Himself in the record of His mighty acts. But He is also a God who has new things to say to men. He has His prophets who tell men of the will and purpose of God in ways unknown before. He is continually leading men on to yet more glorious things. So it is also with Jesus.

¶ Says Stanley Jones: 'As I hear Jesus challenging almost every single religious conception and institution of that day—the current views concerning God and man, the meaning of religion, the Sabbath, the Temple, the Law, the authority of the Sanhedrin, I am convinced that He is a radical. But when I see Him gather up every truth out of the past, conserving and completing it, and saying "I came not to destroy but to fulfil" I know that He is a conservative. He is both. He says "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old!"'



3. If, then, our faith is to combine these two elements, we must first of all 'possess a past tense.' Jesus Himself was steeped in the religion of the Old Testament. He knew it far more deeply than His contemporaries. He had penetrated its inner meaning and spirit. He had sifted the permanent from the passing, accidental forms of the age. He handled it with reverence, though also with freedom. If we may judge from His quotations, His favourite books were those of the deepest spiritual message, and the widest and most liberal outlook. He built His own truth into the foundations laid. And we, too, can borrow strength from the past, using it with the same discrimination. We can value and use the past without submitting to its dead hand. Our religion is a historic religion, grounded in certain events that happened. We cannot keep our faith alive without constant recourse to the New Testament records. Nor will it ever be amiss to learn from that which others in every age have experienced of Christ.

It is fatally easy to caricature the past. It is a harder but more worth while task to see the life behind the forms and the language in which it expressed itself. We can only do that when we have learned that in these forms men once crystallized the passionately held convictions by which they lived. In our iconoclasm we may lose what they had gained, their sense of God. 'Prove,' says the Apostle, 'and hold fast that which is good.' Beethoven the innovator in music was also Beethoven the master of his craft as it had been taught by those who went before him. So we need to fortify our faith by the strength we borrow from our inheritance.

¶ 'Modern knowledge,' says Canon Oliver Quick, 'may compel us to abandon—not without regret—beliefs that were dear to the forefathers of the faith. But before we allow ourselves to part with any legacy which they have bequeathed to us, we must make sure that we appreciate the full value of our heritage.'

4. But God is also the God of those who believe that there is more light and truth to be revealed. We can only possess the past as we pour it into new moulds. It is our task to improve upon our heritage, and leave it a greater thing. We have to interpret our knowledge of Christ to our own generation, to the needs and problems of to-day. We face a

changing world. Its fundamental issues have a new setting. The drama of good and evil, of the challenge to faith and heroism, has a new setting. An *old* gospel is not a gospel. It is not good news, for it has become staled and unconvincing. If we have no forward look, no pioneering spirit, we become as lost in the stream of things as the character in *Milestones* who refused to believe that there could be anything better than wooden ships.

¶ Not long ago there died a dramatist whose latter years had been shadowed by the fact that no one would produce or print his plays. It was a bitter pill for one who had known the taste of fame. As he described the plots he was working out, and the characters he was delineating the reason for his failure became clear. He was still thinking in terms of the situations, the heroes and heroines, that had captured the imagination of those for whom he wrote decades ago. He had not moved with the times. And in religion, as Dr Fosdick reminds us, there is a sin of being behind the times.

The Christian way is full of surprises. We cannot tell what it may ask of us next. Faith in the Holy Spirit is faith that God is still leading us to adventurous things. Faith in the living Christ means that He still goes before us to our Jerusalem. He is no figure of history alone. He is with us to face the crises of our life and the events of our time; to remind us of the eternal principles by which we must live in these days; to help us to set the challenge of the Kingdom of God against things as they are, and set right the faulty things of life. To fail there is to fail in our allegiance to Christ. Under His leadership we become pilgrims of the dawn.

## The Presence of God

Gen. xxviii. 16.—'Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not.'

WHEN Jacob woke from his deep sleep the stark, bare hillside and the long stretches of sand had taken on a new significance, and were alive with a new meaning. Not a single external feature of the scene had been changed, yet Jacob woke with a new vision. As he placed a big stone upright, and called it Bethel—the

House of God—his soul was filled with a deep wonder and a solemn awe. God was in this place and he had not known it. The change had come, not in an outward change of Nature, but by a transformation in his soul.

Unexpectedness is a characteristic of all revelation, whether of man or of God. When we think we have exhausted a beloved subject, it reveals new and unexpected depths. The landscape that has been familiar to us from our childhood days will suddenly reveal itself to us with a glory not previously seen. A book that has been our companion for long years will again and again open fresh doors into wider truth, and as we read will awaken new visions. Especially is this true of the Bible, of Nature, and of men and women; and most of all is it true of those whom we love and who love us.

¶ This quality of unexpectedness in Nature is very beautifully described in *The Choir Invisible*: 'Once, when John Gray had been walking along a woodland path with his eyes fixed on the ground in front of him, as was his studious wont, it seemed as if there was not one thing in the path itself to catch his notice: only brown dust—little stones—a twig—some blades of withered grass. Then all at once, out of this dull, dead motley of harmonious nothingness, a single gorgeous spot had revealed itself, swelled out and disappeared: a butterfly had opened its wings, laid bare their inside splendours, and closed them again, presenting to the eye only the adaptive, protective exterior of those marvellous swinging doors of its life. He had wondered then that Nature could so paint the two sides of this thinnest of all canvases; the outside merely daubed over that it might resemble the dead and common and worthless amid which the creature had to live. It was a master work of concealment—the inside designed and drawn and coloured with lavish fullness of plan, grace of curve, marvel of hue, all for the purpose of the exquisite self-revelation which should come when the one great invitation of existence was sought or was given.'

1. We know that the God revealed in Nature is far below the God of Love and Spirit revealed in Jesus Christ, and we realize that the God of Nature cannot meet the full or the deepest needs of the spirit of man; nevertheless, it is a precious revelation of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

'The Lord is in this place and I knew it not.' Is not our attitude to Nature accurately described in these words? A materialistic conception of Nature does not explain the beauty expressed in tree and flower, neither can we understand Nature if we see therein only a blind working of ruthless force. The heavy tomes written by men of science do not exhaust the full significance of Nature to man. Wordsworth is as essential as the botanist and the geologist; Ruskin cannot be neglected if we would understand the meaning of the clouds, the beauty of the sky, the glory of the mountains, the grandeur of rocks, the splendour of the stars, and the wizard charm of flowers and trees, of leaves and mosses. We cannot rightly interpret Nature by means of the microscope, the telescope, and the test-tube. When we leave our scientific textbooks and walk in the woods, or climb the hills, or stroll by the sea, we are constrained to say with Jacob: 'Surely the Lord is in this place.'

¶ When Jean François Millet was a small boy, his father would often take him out into the fields towards evening. They would lie in the long grass near the edge of the wood, and watch the birds flying home on lazy wings. They would see the rabbits coming out of the copse to revel in the dimpsy light. Even the grass, swayed by the evening breeze, had its importance, for Père Millet was teaching his son to find beauty everywhere. Once the sun set with peculiar glory. They watched in silence. Then the man rose to his feet, bared his head, and, standing in wonder, said: 'My son, it is God.'<sup>1</sup>

2. Strange has been the history of man upon earth! Looked at from one standpoint it seems a mad, bad scramble, a weltering chaos of wickedness of all kinds and degrees. Generations come and go, nations rise and fall, and there seems no guidance, no development, and little permanent increase of good. Our modern civilization seems so paltry and unworthy when we remember that it is the work of ages, and of millions of lives. Our advance in either intellect or character seems so broken, so uneven, so doubtful—only a veneer. Every page of that painful history is stained with sin and folly, with cruel blundering and active crime. The high endowment of man is as often used for base as for noble ends. The best in him seems such an insecure and unreliable possession. It

<sup>1</sup> L. F. Church, *In the Storm*, 96.



is hard to trace the working of the Divine within and above man in the story of his past.

Yet we feel how sadly wrong is the judgment which denies such a presence and guidance of the affairs of men and nations. In the far dawn of man's life on earth, amongst peoples concerning whom we know but little, we read of an Abraham hearing and obeying the call of God; and in other races we learn of those who hailed the Unseen with their own cheer. In the strangely eventful career of the people of Israel, amid all their crass earthliness, we find again and again the incoming of God into their national life, guiding the destiny of the individual and the nation. There is much in this and in other history to give us pause, and much that seems to give a flat denial to our belief; yet, despite the blood, the tears, and the heartbreak, we say of the past, 'Surely God is in it!' Amid all that which makes us hesitate we still can say that God has not left Himself without witnesses. Heaven is not divorced from earth. God is not cut off from man.

3. Surely God is in the lives of our brethren and sisters, but we know it not. Few of us have the vision of Walt Whitman:

Why should I wish to see God better than  
this day?

I see something of God each hour of the  
twenty-four, and each moment then;

In the faces of men and women I see God, and  
in my own face in the glass;

I find letters from God dropped in the street—  
and every one is signed by God's name,

And I leave them where they are, for I know  
that, where'er I go,

Others will punctually come for ever and  
ever.

In our daily life we meet and work with men and women, yet we see them not. We are tragically blind. For years we just know them as business people or tradesfolk, acquaintances or neighbours. Sometimes we criticize them, pass harsh judgment on them maybe, and then something happens which in a moment transforms them in our eyes—and we see the real man or the real woman for the first time. When once we see the soul of our brother, we are compelled again to say, 'Surely the Lord is here and we knew it not.'

4. How often in our own lives are we blind to the Presence of God. It seems as though we are unable to see God as He comes towards us, or as He walks by our side in the day's life. We can recognize Him only in a backward glance. Our Ebenezer is, 'Hitherto has the Lord led me'; we are seldom able to say, 'Now the Lord taketh my hand. The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters.' He leads us by a way we know not; we are unconscious of the leading, and only at the end do we realize that we have been led.

Our troubles and sorrows are not all in the past. Many of us are in the desert now, weary and heavy-laden with the burdens of the hour. Can we not apply the logic of our past Bethels to our present sufferings? The Lord is never very far from any one of us. In Him we live and move and have our being. The Lord is in our present experience, in the present joy or sorrow, though we know it not. 'So long thy power hath blessed me, sure it still will lead me on.'

This was a point and a logic that Jacob could not perceive. The realization of the Presence of God brought no joyous response from his heart, only a superstitious dread—'How dreadful is this place!' Neither did he win to the heart of the vision. He only realized that this particular place was the House of God; he did not go on to the full truth that every place on earth is equally near to heaven, that in every experience of our life we may have and know the companionship of God. Jacob did not know that the nearness of God hallows the whole earth, and sanctifies the whole of life. He had found God on the barren hillside, where he dreamed his strange dream and woke with the feeling that the place whereon he had slept was holy. He made his vow, which was more of a bargain than a consecration; his aspirations were on the low material plane, yet in spite of his limited conception of God, he gained step by step a larger outlook and a knowledge of a fuller life. But we may, and must, go on to this larger truth—that He is with us always, even unto the end of the world. Every experience may become an open door through which the glory of the eternal may shine into our life, and through which we catch a glimpse of the face of the Father. Our troubles must not

result in only a sudden, electric introduction to God, but must usher in an abiding companionship with Him.

## The House of God

Gen. xxviii. 17.—‘This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.’

1. *How the House of God is founded.*—This story shows how a right beginning is made. A raw, cunning boy had been banished from home for his tricks, and he started out on foot across the hills to visit a distant uncle. He had walked until he was tired, and then he threw himself down on the bare hillside, as solitary a creature as the broad sky covered. But in his sleep he saw a ladder with God’s angels mounting and descending, and the Lord Himself at the top of it, and words were spoken in his heart which made the future great. ‘And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.’ Architecture, and ritual, and music, and a gathered crowd, have so large a place in the ordinary conception of a house of God that they are often taken as essential, whilst really they are no more than accidents; for, in its essence, a house of God is any place at which God has revealed Himself to a man. That is the only consecration worth speaking of, and without that no church is worthy of the name.

¶ ‘This place,’ says Ruskin,<sup>1</sup> ‘not this church; not this city; not this stone, even, which he puts up for a memorial—the piece of flint on which his head was lain. But this place; this any place where God lets down the ladder.’

This suggests that, in its origin, the house of God is a solitary place. In religion there is a real infection of ardour, which may spread through the crowd like a running fire across a prairie. But the beginning is made in solitude, and at every later stage, if the work has any value, each soul will take a separate course; others may travel by the same road, but each is moved by his own decision, and is governed by experiences and discoveries which are as closely personal as if there were no other in the world but himself and God. One part of

the profit of public worship consists in the freedom which it gives from interruption, and all true preachers have the gift of isolating men, and talking to them in the crowd heart to heart. For the house of God is, first and last, a place where the Lord discovers Himself to His friends in some other way than He does to the world.

And, since God is in it, it follows that the house of God is entirely independent of circumstances. Ezekiel intends more than a geographical note when he tells that it was ‘among the captives, by the river Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and he saw visions of God.’ For the profit of his dejected fellow-countrymen, who fancied that they could not worship God in exile, he declares that a heathen land, with all its corrupting and degrading influences, does not hinder; and in the records of God’s hidden Church it is written of ten thousand blessed places where glory seemed excluded, yet it came. In the spot where Jacob made discovery of God’s house, everything was wanting but the essentials. ‘The track,’ says Dean Stanley, ‘winds through an uneven valley, covered, as with grave-stones, by large sheets of bare rock, some of which stand up like the cromlechs of Druidical monuments. There is little in these hills and valleys on which the imagination can fasten.’ Desolation is sometimes so vast and savage as to exalt the mind, but this is simply unhomelike; yet the imagination, working through the boy’s dream, found in these unpromising materials the stuff out of which a vision could be made. The flat shelves of rock appeared as steps in a stairway up to God. About him there had been outspread the huge emptiness of night. He was quite alone; driven from home, and doubtful what sort of welcome might await him in Haran, he fancied that no one except his mother cared what came to him; but there at his side he found angels, and in his ears resounded words from God. That was a noble transformation, earth at its earthliest giving place to what is high, a scene which left both heart and eye hungry becoming the starting-point for a vision of splendour.

¶ My personal recollections go to a little, dilapidated, brick meeting house in the Chautauqua hills. It was a poor place when I was a boy; it is a poor place yet. It never was rich and prosperous; it always was one of the shabbiest churches in town. Moreover, it

<sup>1</sup> *The Crown of Wild Olive.*



preached an old theology that I cannot believe, and stood for denominational peculiarities in which I am utterly uninterested now. But one morning, in that church, ah, my soul, remember ! I, as a boy, caught a glimpse of the vision glorious. Every man has shrines of pilgrimage. That is one of the chief of mine, that little, dilapidated brick meeting house in the Chautauqua hills.<sup>1</sup>

It is still in God's working that the beginning of a house of God is made, and His presence cannot be excluded even by the meanest surroundings. He who cannot worship except under conditions of human contrivance has not rightly learned to worship at all. God must rear His own house, and we must learn to recognize where He is pointing the way. The solemn associations of a building, the crowd, the hush, the burst of music, the break and the entreaty of the preacher's voice may help our mood, and God makes use of all ; but faith is not a storm of emotion, it is a personal meeting with the God of our life, and to that some of the things for which we ask may be a hindrance. We need to magnify this first essential, for it is easy to cheat ourselves with a word, and to fancy that by its nature, and without effort of soul on our part, a church is a house of God, and that coming to it is a virtuous and godly act. For many it may be such, and they will never cross the threshold without some glad sense of anticipation. But for many it may be as profane as the street corner, a place of stone and timber merely ; but, when God reveals Himself, that aspect of it is forgotten. It is for that we must seek diligently, remembering His own word, that those who seek shall find.

2. *How the House of God is built up and made permanent.*—Consider the audacity of Jacob's phrase. He did not reckon that this was a place at which he had *happened* to meet with God ; he said, ' This is the house of God,' the place where He lives and where I may look for Him again. Like a child, he believed that the ladder stood at that spot not for one moment, but always, as if by nature. This, he imagined, is a place at which heaven and earth meet, and where angels are always passing up and down to maintain the communication between God and man ; so, when he came back to Palestine, he turned with confidence to Bethel.

<sup>1</sup> H. E. Fosdick.

In later days his descendants, if they had been challenged, might have said—God is everywhere ; but commonly they were content to say of particular spots, God, most certainly, is here ; and at these places they waited for Him. The grey morning returned for Jacob, and he rose for the day's tramp on to where fortune was bearing him ; but never again could he see that hillside without some quickening of hope. God, surely, was there, and he always returned to Bethel with a mind prepared for great things. Are we as wise as he ?

God, it is true, has more lessons than the one ; there are many entrances into that upper kingdom of the spirit, varieties of experience and of teaching, coming all of them from a God who speaks in many parts and in many modes. But we are not therefore left to the mercy of accident. ' God is everywhere,' said Luther, ' but He is also nowhere. He is where it is His will to be found.' There are tracts of life and thought in which we may grope in vain for any certain revelation ; and thus it is the worst of folly, if once we have seen God, not to magnify that opportunity, and return upon it again and again, to search what it contains for us. Every one who knows God at all has texts, and memories, and insight of his own, and these are his ladder by which entrance is made possible into the world of truth and power above ; and they are given that they may be used. But there is a travesty of that, for many people ask for nothing else than to have their own experiences recalled, and their own texts expounded. They would have preaching and worship travel always in one circle, and beyond what they first saw they will not go. But that is a caricature of religion. A ladder gives access to something broader than its own top ; and when God has opened a way of entrance for us into His high world of truth He means that we should always be drawing out of it fresh wealth for our own life. Week by week, as we meet in His house, we should be looking for the new things which are on their way ; and thus the Church, consecrated by experience and by habit, will link us with a world of things beyond experience.

It is very likely that our Bethel will not be a house of God to every one, our texts will not seem central and controlling to all men, our favourite book and preacher will not be admirable to all. And yet we may also count upon

it that what has come as a revelation of God to us will have something in it for other men as well. 'He is the propitiation,' said St John, 'not for our sins only, but also for the whole world.' Some of us are much inclined to hold our faith apart from men as if it were an individual peculiarity, showing rather what we are than what God is. Now, if it is a revelation at all, that cannot be the case. The world is in sore need of God, and if we never commend to others what has made such difference to ourselves we may rob them of the best that life could give.

¶ 'Whatever charge of folly,' says Ruskin, 'may attach to the man who says, There is no God, the folly is prouder, deeper, and less pardonable of him who says, There is no God but for me.'

¶ Prebendary H. Erskine Hill has told the story of two men who were partners in business in one of the great cities. One man was a regular attender at church; the other professed no religion at all. It was a Sunday morning and they met in the same tram, the one on his way to church, the other to play golf. As they separated the latter said to his companion: 'Look here, So-and-so, when are you going to give up all this hypocrisy about religion and

church-going?' 'I don't understand you,' said the other. 'I mean just what I say, when are you going to give up this hypocrisy?' Much offended, his companion answered: 'What right have you to call my religion hypocrisy?' 'Well,' said the other, 'we have been partners for twenty years. We have met and talked together every day. You know quite well that if what you profess to believe is true, it is a very hopeless case for me, and yet you have never said one word to help me to be anything different.'<sup>1</sup>

For every man there are hindrances in the way of his finding God, and our business is to prepare God's way by reducing these; and much of that is done by a vigorous congregational life. In the languid church, where the stranger's heart is chilled before a word is spoken, how shall the people escape reproach? To any true church, each member should bring his contribution of attention, reverence, fervour, contrition, and thus the spirit even of the reluctant would be constrained, and the grace, which the few have known, would become the property of others also, who would be able, in their turn, to say: 'This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.'

<sup>1</sup> L. D. Weatherhead, *Discipleship*, 127.

## NOT A BARGAIN, BUT A DEDICATION

Gen. xxviii. 20-22.—'And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: . . . and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.'

Matt. x. 22.—'And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.'

THERE is a great gap between these two viewpoints upon a man's relations with God. The one looks upon religion as a bargain; the other as a dedication. The one promises loyalty under certain specified conditions; the other invites loyalty, come what may.

As there is a great gap between their utterances, so there was a world of difference between the two speakers, Jacob and Jesus. Jacob, to whom the first utterance is attributed, had the instinct for bargaining strongly developed; from his youth he had an eye for the main chance. On a memorable occasion he satisfied his brother's hunger only when Esau agreed,

under duress, that the price of food should be the precious birthright which Jacob had envied. As he had no compunction in dealing with his own brother, so he dealt with God—as a bargainer. Religion, at this point in his career at any rate, was just another transaction. He would be loyal to God, would acknowledge and assist the prosecution of His purposes, provided God undertook to protect, guide, and prosper him wheresoever his lot might be cast. Any wavering on God's side, any indication that His protection was withdrawn, would render the agreement invalid. For to Jacob religion was an investment, and, like his



other investments, must yield a substantial interest. That was Jacob's viewpoint.

What of Jesus' viewpoint? It finds expression in the words we have chosen to associate with those of Jacob. The last thing they suggest is that *He* was a bargainer. Religion to Jesus was not a bargain but a dedication, a service from which a real man never sought discharge, a crusade in which a man spent himself, whether conditions were bad or good. When Jesus helped men there was no thought of payment or of compensation. His devotion to God was not conditioned by specified provisions; He gave Himself to God wholly, body and mind and soul, giving effect to His commands, cost obedience what it might.

Which of these viewpoints is ours? Which of these viewpoints *ought* to be ours?

1. All down the years the world has had men of Jacob's tribe, whose attitude to God and religion has been largely his. There have always been some who have attached themselves to the Christian Church because, believing that all within the fellowship were sharers in a special providence, they felt it paid. When, however, attachment to the Church ceased to pay, when problems which confronted those without, and which they, being within, expected to escape, also confronted them, such have not hesitated to dissociate themselves from all Christian belief and practice, avowing that its claims could not be substantiated. Always they promised loyalty, but, as in Jacob's case, the promise was prefaced by an 'if.' 'If,' said Jacob, 'God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God . . . and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.' That has been the spirit of many besides Jacob. We have possibly all known such people, who followed so long as fortune favoured them and the cause of righteousness suffered hurt at no man's hand.

Due, perhaps, to the unusual times through which we are passing, a viewpoint not dissimilar is making itself evident. It may be unfair to suggest that some of our contemporaries are commercializing religion as Jacob did, but it is fair to say that some are prefacing their promise of loyalty these days with an 'if.'

Occasionally one has come upon people who hold the opinion that God is on trial and that, unless He acts in ways which they do not hesitate to specify, He is failing to justify the trust men have been encouraged to repose in Him. Others have gone still further. Unless God does something miraculous, they affirm, they will no longer be able to believe in Him but will be compelled, out of sheer honesty, to sever connexion with His visible Church. It may not be Jacob's attitude exactly, but it shares largely of its spirit. Unless God does something the agreement made with Him will be invalid.

Because one knows that such utterances are made in most instances neither carelessly nor thoughtlessly, since one understands they are spoken under the stress of great emotion and from a concern for a cause whose triumph they desire to see, one has a very real sympathy with the speakers. We are living, one must admit, in unusually difficult times. The terrible destruction, the suffering of the innocent, the overwhelming power of mechanized force, have shocked and shaken us. There are so many things we don't understand. There are so many questions to which none can supply answers. It all seems so contrary to the purpose and the Will of God it is hardly surprising that some of us have said what we've said, that we are finding it difficult to hold to the remaining shreds of our faith.

2. The question we must ask ourselves, however, is this: while such a viewpoint, considering the circumstances in which we live, is understandable, is it in the last resort defensible? Are we justified in suggesting that God is on trial and that, unless He acts as we choose to specify, He is failing to justify our faith in Him? Is it worthy of us that we should engage to interest ourselves in the establishment of righteousness only so long as the process of establishing it is unattended by opposition and pain and privation? Did ever God undertake to act as we now call upon Him to do? Was ever promise made that we should never know opposition?

To ask ourselves such questions is to be reminded of the gap between the utterance of Jacob and of Jesus, of the difference between the two speakers. It is to recognize that, until we have discovered that religion is not a bargain

but a dedication, that loyalty is not loyalty so long as it is accompanied by conditions, we have failed to get to the heart of the matter.

When the frame of mind overtakes us in which we feel that because God does not act as we desire, that when righteousness is suffered to encounter stern opposition He is letting us down, we should recollect Him who in this utterance left nothing to His disciples' imagination of the opposition they would shortly be called upon to face. He Himself had traversed and was yet to traverse further the road He prophesied would soon be appointed to them. He Himself had shared the experiences which would shortly be theirs. He had watched the crowds come—and go. He had known popularity—and unpopularity. He was to die alone. But in His loneliness, deserted by His disciples, He was sure of this above all, that right was still right, that good was better than evil, cost goodness what it might, that it was a man's responsibility to die for what he believed rather than recant in order to save his life. It was that deep-rooted conviction, which no opposition could ever dislodge, that constrained Him, even when He found it difficult to understand why the road appointed Him was so hard and as difficult to penetrate God's purpose in demanding such sacrifices of Him, to pursue His way to the bitter end. Religion was not a bargain, but a dedication. Righteousness might be maligned, attacked, hard bestead, but it was a cause worth living for, worth dying for. It was therefore as One who had Himself withstood the test of opposition, who had Himself held firmly to one particular viewpoint upon a man's relations with God, that He appealed to His disciples. It was as One who knew from experience how subtly opposition operates, how easily, because things do not run as he had hoped they would, a man's courage wilts, how a man can suggest to himself that he is much more concerned than God for the salvation of the world, that He exhorted them to take the trail which He had blazed.

If we recollected such things would *our* attitude undergo a change? True, even after consideration of such things, the mystery of our present circumstances remains and the questions which have haunted us are still unanswered. But, acknowledging the mystery and the questions besetting our life, is it not true that whatever happens right is still right,

that it is better to be good than to be bad, that it is a man's responsibility to hold to what he believes, cost what it may? That was the deep-rooted conviction which constrained Jesus to pursue His appointed way to the bitter end. Will that same conviction constrain us, who are being called upon to endure and to sacrifice more than we had anticipated and who are finding God's purposes difficult to penetrate, to pursue *our* way to the end—an end, Jesus assured His disciples, as He assures us, which will not disappoint us? For 'He,' He said, 'that endureth to the end shall be saved'—shall find his fight justified and himself vindicated.

3. It would perhaps be well, in thinking of what our attitude ought to be to-day, to stress that word 'endure' which Jesus used.

Because some of us have interpreted religion as a bargain, because nothing which we had hoped would happen has happened, we have felt justified in expressing our disappointment and in threatening to cast our faith to the winds. But what if Jesus and not Jacob is right? What if religion *is* a dedication? What if, on examination, we discover that we were warned concerning opposition and carefully counselled regarding it? In that case, surely, our prayers ought not to be occupied with our disappointment but charged with a desire for courage and the power to endure, so that, in our day and generation, we to whom the torch of truth has been given may fail neither God nor the world it was intended we should serve.

There was a day, you may remember, in the life of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when, because of the stand they took, they were subjected to many indignities. Their opponents finally threatened them with a fate from which not even their God could save them. 'If it be so,' said the three, 'our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.' It is such men, dedicated to a cause, possessed of convictions no opposition can ever dislodge, who move the world to a cleaner sty. It is such men who have the only satisfaction that matters in life, a conscience void of offence towards God. It is such men



who receive the reward at the last, the crown of righteousness that fadeth not away.

If ever the world needed such men it is to-day, when evil stalks the earth and when the forces of unrighteousness, by their studied cruelty, attempt to break the resistance of men of faith. Let us pray God that we, recognizing the dedication to which we have been called, may be given grace to fight and not to mind the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labour and not to ask for any reward save that of knowing that we do His Will.

RODERICK BETHUNE.

### Life's Best Teacher

Gen. xxx. 27.—'I have learned by experience.'

THE reason that preaching counts for so little in certain quarters surely arises from the fact that it seems to great multitudes to be a mere mechanical repetition of something which it is supposed to be necessary to believe, with no vivid consciousness, no real appreciation of the modern, urgent cry of human life. It does not seem to be related to the deep, agonizing experiences of men. Life does mean, and mean intensely to those who really live it, and it is incredible to such souls that there can be any relation between dull, dry formula and the living reality they know.

Grey, grey are all the theories,  
But green the golden tree of life.

And so men and women are more and more coming back to the old position that experience is the only real teacher. One of the greatest figures of last century, Ibsen, has said of what is perhaps his supreme creation, 'Brand,' 'It came into being as the result of something which I had not observed but experienced.' Wordsworth himself has told us that the moving poetry, the really great poetry which we now associate with his name, followed the great experiences which had first humanized his soul. A modern writer—one of the most modern of the moderns—in a very powerful book has said: 'Life is to me just one great experiment: every time one gets more and more hurt, but

one at least learns from experience.' He goes on to speak of the help we get from a man who has really lived and he cites one who has sung as all real men of genius sing—and all real preachers preach, one might say—with a thorn at his throat. 'I have learned from experience.'

To learn by experience does more for us than all the preaching in the world and all the books we have read. Francis Thompson reminds us of the fiery inner experience, the dire spiritual struggle which set the trenches on Dante's brow. No wonder he was called by the women and children of Florence the man who had been in hell! He had passed through it; he had learned in the school of experience.

Now let us look at two or three of the things that experience has taught us.

1. First of all experience has taught us *the inadequacy of the things of sense*; 'the irremediable inadequacy,' as Baron Friedrich von Hügel has phrased it, 'of even the totality of all our present earthly conditions, though improved to the utmost—in so far as these conditions do not include, or lead up to, God and His presence—to satisfy the soul's wants.' We have learned in the school of experience that things are not what they seem; that appearances are deceptive; that the things that are seen are temporal and often mislead us. We learn perhaps not to judge by appearances. Perhaps some of us gain an insight similar to that of Wagner's Parsifal, an insight gained through temptation. We come to see that the gratification of the sensual appetites can never satisfy an immortal spirit; the thirst of the soul continues and can never be satisfied in anything other than the Eternal.

Every time we believe that in the things of sense—'the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life'—that in these we can find true life; every time when by our actions we place our faith in these things we are weakening that Kingdom of God which is slowly coming; we are holding back the chariot wheels of Christ's Kingdom. There could be no more fitting prayer for us, even if it be a prayer between sobs, than this:

Pity me still, though eyes that travel hither  
See only how my hands on garlands close—  
Yea, if it needs make some fair blossom wither,  
Or wound me with the thorns upon my rose.

2. In the next place the lesson taught us by experience is a *new insight into the meaning and glory of suffering*. In Masefield's play in verse entitled *Good Friday*, the only character that really matters—for the figure of our Lord does not appear—is one accounted a madman. He is blind and at one point he utters these remarkable words: 'I have touched wisdom since they took my eyes.' Think of Milton—as his sight fails him he but learns to see God better. Think of George Matheson, the blind preacher and poet—his sight goes and then he writes the immortal lines: 'O love that wilt not let me go.' Think of St Francis of Assisi, that gay and gracious troubadour of Jesus Christ, who by the anguish of sharp personal experience was turned from sin to God. Think of Savonarola, of Livingstone, of Father Damien—all are types of those who turned their weakness into strength and learned in the school of experience that sorrow is not the final word but that in it there is a strange, exultant joy.

¶ 'The darkness,' said that gallant spirit, Kagawa of Japan, describing his feelings when it seemed that he was going to lose his sight, 'the darkness is a holy of holies of which no one can rob me. In the darkness I meet God face to face.'

3. Or, again, we learn from our own early experience *not to be deterred in life by what seems to be a final setback*. Not to turn from the battle, in other words, because the impact of the enemy seems to be overpowering. What we like most of all about Dr. Johnson is the fact that his life was of such a character that he has been described for all time as one who was 'an old struggler.' One who had passed through experiences which might well have overwhelmed another soul, but still faced the future bravely and with such courage as he might. We learn from experience that victory frequently comes only through defeat. The great words of our Lord, 'Whosoever saveth his life shall lose it,' are interpreted by our own partial experience even here. We know quite well that life is never the flawlessly beautiful thing it appears to confident youth; that it is never as a summer's day throughout. The storms gather and the sky is black, only illumined perhaps from time to time by a radiance which serves to accentuate our own personal

misery, then the temptation becomes acute to say that life is a failure and the soul can do no more. That is the most perilous time in a man's life. 'In the midst of the years make known.' It is largely the peril of middle age when we cannot summon up fresh energy to go on and wage the old warfare and to believe that after all the beautiful early dream is true. Beauty is not simply the thing it appears to youth. The most beautiful thing is worked out from sorrow, courage, prayer and disappointment—that is the final beauty of life.

We are not minimizing the fact that joy can enable us to live more truly; not turning aside from what every one of us knows to be true—how a sudden, unexpected joy coming into the life irradiates everything—yet we must know that while there is a place for these things, life is not all that, so that we shall not be overwhelmed, not be too greatly surprised, when the darker things come.

4. And then we learn in the school of experience *our own weakness, our own limitations, and we learn to turn to Another*. We know there is no salvation in ourselves. We know that it is only by drawing upon an inner and Divine source, upon Christ within, constantly day by day, that we can make life clean, sweet, beautiful, and helpful to others. We learn to trust not in any supposed infallible Church, but in the unfailing Christ. That surely was the secret of St Paul who, in one of his highest moments, expressed this desire, 'That I may know Him and the fellowship of His sufferings.' What a strange wish! In life the only people some of us care to know are the successful people. That I may know Him—'despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.' There is no experience so illuminating as that of the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. If life has been so far a great disappointment, it is because we have never yet heard the one thing that will illumine it all and make it, if not quite clear, at least not wholly unintelligible. We need something to enable us at least to surmise a hidden harmony in what seems to be appalling discord. Only one master-hand can introduce the long lost chord divine; it is the hand of Christ, and that hand is a wounded hand, the print of the nails is there.



We murmur—'Where is any certain tune  
Or measured music, in such notes as these?'—  
But angels, leaning from the golden seat,  
Are not so minded; their fine ear hath won  
The issue of completed cadences.<sup>1</sup>

## From a Fear to a Faith

Gen. xxxi. 53.—'And Jacob sware by the Fear of his father Isaac' (R.V.).

John xvii. 26.—'I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it.'

1. THAT the Bible is the record of a progressive discovery and revelation of God, is for some devout people still a difficult thing to receive. But nothing could be more fatal to understanding the Bible than to suppose that it gives us one flat level of spiritual (and, for that matter, of moral) knowledge. It is not a flat level, but an ascent. It is by no means a continuous ascent, but over the long range it does move, and move upward. It is a movement of the mind and of the moral nature through failures and mistakes, as well as through vivid enlightenments and spiritual venturings. The value of each stage can be tested only by the end to which it leads, and the end to which it leads is Jesus Christ.

Some one has said, speaking of the progress of science, that 'all discoveries are essentially discoveries in the obvious.' And by that he meant to protest against the idea that we are living in a world in which precious things are kept back from us, to be doled out a little at a time. On the contrary, all the riches of the Universe have at all times been open to and ready for our use. The defect has been in our unpreparedness and inability to use them. We had not eyes to see or hands to handle them, but the things themselves have been as obvious for ten thousand years as now. Steam moved things before James Watt watched the kettle-lid. Sound waves were travelling the trackless air and any generation could have discovered what Edison and Marconi have shown us if only they had a mind to perceive it. And 'that's the rub.' It is like the man who said he could have written as good plays as Shakespeare if he had had a mind to.

So it has been with God. But one after

another the veils have been thrust aside, until at length that which hid the Holiest was rent from top to bottom and there was nothing, except our own lingering and strange reluctance, between us and the very best and fullest we have any need here to know of God.

2. There was a time when the human soul, reaching out after God, was but little removed from the primitive stage of Nature religions. It was when man began to find and recognize what he thought must be God in haunted things, when all things had their spirits or their demons—air, waters, fire, processes of Nature, storm, eclipse, dawn and darkness. Primitive man was trying to explain his universe. He was in a world of spirits, but not one of them was a Holy Spirit. He was not ready for that yet. The Hebrew peoples came from a stock in which this animism, as it is called, was deeply engrained; we can find the track of it over large ranges of the Bible. The Asherah was a sacred pole, the teraphim were fetishes of the fireside. The wilderness of Azazel into which the scapegoat was sent was the haunt of the chief demon of the solitudes, for Azazel is not a place-name, but the name of the evil spirit supposed to inhabit the waste places. The Bible is not afraid to lead us to those dim movements by which man began to feel his way. It is not afraid to let us see how deep was the deep out of which man has cried unto God.

3. Now we are at this stage with Jacob: 'And Jacob sware by the Fear of his father Isaac.' The word 'fear' is printed with a capital letter in the Revised Version. It does not mean that Jacob or Isaac was simply afraid. It means that both of them called God 'the Fear.' The Old Testament patriarchs and saints had their own name for the God whom they served; to one He was 'the Rock,' to another 'the Shield,' to another 'the Shepherd'; but to Isaac He was 'the Fear,' 'the Dreadful One.'

Pascal once declared that there are times when a shudder is an argument. What we have here is religion that has got as far as that shudder which is an argument. And it is a thin, precarious religion which has lost its sense of awe at the tremendousness of Almighty God.

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

¶ I have often noticed that the faces of very devout people seem at first sight to look rather frightened. I was noticing that recently in a portrait of that great Anglican saint, Lancelot Andrewes. There seems to be a look of apprehension in his eyes. It is an expression of the awe which came to him from the constant sense of God's presence.<sup>1</sup>

We should not lose that Fear. It is the beginning of wisdom. What is needed is what the psychologists call the sublimation of the shudder. When a religion has a great God and is an awed fellowship with Him in His majesty and holiness, there is that same light on its face as was on the face of Moses, when he came down from the heights and the people could not bear to look on his face. Their religion had become this weak, jazzing affair, which set them dancing around a foolish calf, and they were frightened when they suddenly saw the face of a man who had seen *God*. There fell on them the shudder that is an argument. Moses had in mercy to veil his face.

4. What, then, is the final truth about God, and whence comes it? For answer we are shut up to Jesus Christ. It is He who said of God, 'I have declared thy name.' 'No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.' Do we believe *that*? Do we believe that Jesus has verified God for us and that for all time this side of eternity He is the manifestation of the final truth about God? Do we believe that God is as true and kind, and yet as ineffably holy as Jesus was?

Studdert Kennedy recounts this incident of his own war years. He was lying by himself in no-man's-land, and, with his heart in his mouth, was watching a dark moving object coming towards him, not knowing whether it was a friend or a foe. It might be neither. It might be just two dead men on top of one another and that it only seemed to move. Fear plays such tricks on raw nerves. 'Suppose I whispered: "Who comes there?"' he says, 'Would the answer be a bullet or a friendly word or simply silence?'

There must have been a tremendous moment in history when Jesus of Nazareth stood looking out into the darkness and called His challenge to the Universe: 'Who comes there?' There

was more than one moment when that happened. When He was a lad it happened, though we don't know the whole tale of it—only what He said to His mother about it; and, even to their mothers, lads don't tell, and can't tell, all about that swirl of emotion and questioning that whirls up. But He was whispering out of the tumult, 'Who comes there?' He had answer and it was 'My Father,' and as He said to His mother, 'I have to be about His business.' Then on a mountain when a cloud came down that made His three friends frightened: 'Who comes there?' And He knew, and when that cloud lifted they were astonished to see His face, it shone so.

Gethsemane was no-man's-land for Jesus. And He whispered, 'Who comes there?' And He got such an answer as wiped the blood and sweat from His face and put there something which the very soldiers fell down before, because they could not bear the glory of it. Then a Cross, and a desolation of heart nobody could describe, and out of the agony of it He whispered, 'Who comes there?' He had such an answer that death's sting was gone, and He slipped out of life, like a tired child falling back on strong arms: 'Into Thy hands.'

Who comes there? And every time the answer was, 'Our Father.'

It is the question we whisper to Life and the Universe. That was why He said at last, 'I have declared Thy Name.' Sometimes we ask because of something incredibly good that has come to us. What or who is there behind it that it should be ours? 'Who comes there?' Sometimes we do it out of the deep of sorrow and disaster and such a tangle of bitter things or such a long waiting, up against what seems finality. Who comes there? 'Listen hard,' says Jesus. 'You will hear what I heard: "Our Father."'

It is an appeal which Christ makes, who won the right to make it; an appeal to us in the great alternatives of life; alternatives which confront us all in varying ways; the alternatives between believing and losing heart, between good and evil, between patience and despair, between seeking and denying God. It is an appeal to take our stand in this world with Him and to do it in the broad daylight of an open confession of His Name.

<sup>1</sup> W. R. Matthews.



## The Traveller

Gen. xxxii. 1.—‘Jacob went on.’

1. JACOB is pre-eminently the traveller. He is always on the road. Nowhere has he a continuing city. There is nothing at first sight, romantic about Jacob. The Bible calls him a plain man. Night by night his brother would return to the encampment with the smell of the field upon his garments and the trophies of the chase in his train. Jacob was the patient farmer, not the daring sportsman; the range of his occupations never took him far from the domestic tent. A practical man and an economist, he understood women and they understood him. Even in the matter of his marriage with Rachel, where the superficial reader sees nothing but a pastoral romance, it is exceedingly doubtful how much of this remains on a closer inspection of the narrative. If he did not marry for money, it must be owned that he went where money was.

What, then, was Jacob's secret? For that he had a secret, and a noble one, who that considers the wonderful history of the Hebrew race can for a moment doubt? We shall, perhaps, best understand it by following up the inevitable comparison at once suggested by the name of Esau. The Bible calls Esau ‘a profane person,’ and we resent the imputation as strongly as we rebel against the choice of Jacob. We fail to recognize that in the whole story of his career there is little positively placed to his credit save the fraternal embrace of his later manhood, in which the memories of an ancient and irreparable wrong were for the moment thrown aside. Whatever romance our fancy may weave around the person of Esau, to him life is the merest prose. As he scales the heights the boulders that beset his path are nothing but limestone rocks, nor will he ever mistake them for the heavenly stairs. No traveller unknown wrestles with him till break of day, nor, as he goes on his way, do the angels of God meet him. What Esau was we can read in the character of his descendants—the Bedouin, who still tramps the unproductive desert; the Edomite, who in the day of Jerusalem cried, ‘Down with it’; the Idumæan king, who, when the Lord of Glory came to crown the purpose of the ages, put on Him a purple robe and, with his soldiers, mocked Him. The

‘profane’ person is the man who does not reverence time; for whom the past has no lessons, the future no possibilities; in whose life is no movement, in whose character no progress; who, for all his restlessness, would be the last to whom we should apply those words which transform our estimate of Jacob and say that he ‘went on.’

Time is ever on the wing. It is fleeing, fleeing, fleeing. What we vainly call the present is, in fact, a narrow section of the past. The world is travelling, and we must perforce travel with it. True, there is one alternative. Stand still we cannot. But if we do not go on our way we may wander. One or other it is bound to be—traveller or vagrant, Jacob or Esau, Israelite or Arab—treading the high road or scouring the sand. And if there is no movement in our character, no purpose in our career, then, whatever be our qualities of head or heart, however amiable our personality, kindly and tolerant though our attitude towards the world may be, one verdict, and one verdict alone is possible. We are nothing but a piece of profanity in a sacred universe.

2. But ‘Jacob went on.’ The words occur in the narrative of the patriarch's approach to Mahanaim, when he was returning from his long exile to the land of his fathers' sepulchres. It was thus that the traveller put himself in line with the creative activity of God as He renews the face of the earth. ‘Jacob went on,’ and he became a different, a transformed, a new Jacob as he journeyed. That is the meaning of his changed name.

Would that we could understand more fully than we do the meaning of this creative quality—that is, the power of gaining something new and, it may be, altogether unsuspected, in the character which is really moving forward! It would make us more gentle in our judgment of others, more hopeful and courageous in the struggle with ourselves. No one is really what he may happen to be at any moment in his career. Whenever there is movement in a man's personality, the very qualities which have issued in mean deeds or despicable actions may become the foundation of the nobler self. Jacob begins by overreaching man. He ends by prevailing with God. His patience, his pertinacity, his subordination of the nearer to the further good—the very qualities that have made the Hebrew feared and hated in the

markets of Europe—are those that have best served the purposes of his splendid religious history. We do not know Jacob till we have followed his moving tent through the vicissitudes of a long career. Those glimpses of the Divine presence which he has caught from time to time in the midway of his mortal life become the inward light of his closing hours.

¶ Life and character tend either upward or downward, but a single act or characteristic may not indicate the tendency of a life as a whole. You can make a saint out of the good qualities of bad men; you can make a devil out of the bad qualities of good men. Esau eclipsed Jacob at first, but his virtues were accidents, incidents, without roots, and they withered before the hot tests of life. Jacob outshone Esau at last. Day by day he fought his natural badness, and won in the hard struggle with himself. The mean supplanter Jacob became the hero Israel, a prince with God. Is it Thy will or my will be done? Are we living to please Christ or to please ourselves? Our answer to this question determines our life-current.<sup>1</sup>

3. The age in which we live has been one of vast disclosures in the science and history of mankind. If Jacob was a plain man dwelling in tents, the far-off progenitor of the human race was an ugly beast swinging in trees. Well, and what then? Why linger in the forest primeval, watching the ungainly capers of our distant ancestor as it lumbers to the topmost boughs or grinds its idiotic teeth? Is that man? Has Time no contribution to make? Has the long evolutionary process nothing to add, no new creations to accomplish? Only when the far-off final transformation is accomplished shall the saying be wholly true, 'In the image of God made he man.' If we want to know what man is we must travel with him on his adventurous career. We must see him as in obedient faith he rises up to go whither he knows not, to a land that is very far off.

Where is one that, born of woman, altogether  
can escape  
From the lower world within him, moods of  
tiger or of ape?  
Man as yet is being made, and, ere the crowning  
Age of ages,  
Shall not æon after æon pass and touch him  
into shape?

<sup>1</sup> M. D. Babcock.

All about him shadow still, but, while the races  
flower and fade,  
Prophet eyes may catch a glory slowly gaining  
on the shade,  
Till the peoples all are one, and all their voices  
blend in choric  
Hallelujah to the Maker, 'It is finished, Man  
is made.'

Look forward at the shining, shadowy figure that goes before us on the mountain track in the twilight of the dawn. That is man. Man did we say? Nay, surely it is God. For He, too, is a traveller, and it is the pilgrims that see Him. The God of whom the Bible speaks is a living God, marching through the ages, travelling in history, taking the risks of development as He beats out a progressive purpose. It is we that are impatient. We would arrest the record of revelation as it unfolds the purpose of the ages. Is this God, who walks in a garden, who regrets that He has made man, who smells the fat of the smoking sacrifice? Is this God, whose blessing is invoked on the treacherous Jael, who commands the slaughter of the Amalekites? While men are disputing about the consistency of such activities as these with the character of a righteous and spiritual Being, God has passed on His way. Look yet again. There, rising above the plain, is the Hill which by interpretation is the place of a skull. Against the sky is the Figure of One hanging on a tree. And as we gaze upon the Cross, whereon the angels ascend and descend, there steals into our spirits the great conviction which solves the problem of our changeful life and reads the riddle of the painful earth: 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not.'

## The Angel Hosts

Gen. xxxii. 1.—'And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.'

THE challenge of what is hidden, and yet cannot in the nature of the case be avoided, is always a searching one. And never more so than when we stand on the threshold of a New Year. That the year will bring trials upon us both as individuals and as a nation, that it will test sincerity and strain faith, we are all



aware. And yet we cannot, we must not, as Christian men and women, allow ourselves to be intimidated by what we do not know. For what we do know is enough to give us firm ground for fullest confidence. We know that whatever else we may meet as we pursue the path that opens out before us we shall find God's good angels there; that as we go forth in pledged loyalty to Him we shall surely encounter them to our comfort and help and encouragement.

1. It is well for us to bear in mind that the Bible observes no such reticence on the subject of angels as we ourselves commonly and mistakenly do. Both in the Old and New Testaments it tells freely of their activity as the messengers and agents of Heaven, the Divine emissaries who bring the help of the Lord in variant form to His people, the 'ministers of His who do His pleasure.' Many of its most vivid stories are associated with their activity, and some of its most encouraging promises also. Who does not gratefully recall, for instance, that 'the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them'? And that 'He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways'? While the record is plain and convincing that Jesus Himself both assumed the existence of the angels in His teaching and welcomed their aid in His own life-experiences. He declared, indeed, that 'legions of angels' were always available to Him; and promised that one characteristic of that life of discipleship to which He called men should be the bestowment upon them of an open vision of 'the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.'

So fully was this borne out in the experience of His early followers that we find them testifying how that in coming to Him, in the sense of yielding their lives to His control and guidance, they had come also 'to an innumerable company of angels,' some of whom, doubtless, had at first seemed to be just strangers whom they entertained unaware of their identity.

All of which combines to assure us that the anticipation of angels in the path, along that new stretch of life's road that lies before us, is no fanciful or morally meaningless figure of speech. There can be nothing unpractical, nothing unrelated to our actual situations and

our prospective needs, in the consideration of that Divine provision for the communication to our lives of essential power, of guidance, courage, and reinforcement, which is the very heart of the gospel.

2. The story of Jacob affords illustration of this very thing. When Jacob first saw the angels he was a man in flight from a deceived father and an outraged brother. He had been a lonely man at Bethel twenty years ago. He was still lonelier now, despite his wives and cattle and servants and gear. And he had long since lost track of the angels who had transformed his loneliness then. Nor had he seen anything during those exile years of the ladder joining earth to heaven. But the angels had not lost track of him. And lo, suddenly and without warning, they stood in his path to remind him that God had not forgotten him; to assure him that though he had drifted he had not drifted 'beyond His love and care.' They brought home to him the fact, which doubtless he had resolutely put out of his mind whenever it had asserted itself there, that there was a much more pressing problem than that of his getting right with Esau. It was that of his getting right with God. And they were there to give him the certainty, which was the great need of his soul, that God still cared, and that He cared enough to want to help him in both of those disquieting problems.

Jacob instinctively recognized the angels. They had long been about his path and his bed, but he had feigned blindness and schooled himself to ignore them. Now, however, he saw that the long-avoided audit of his life could not further be postponed. He had been run to earth. He had come to the end of love's long chain. The presence of the angels made him aware that the great crisis of his life was upon him, and that, for all his adroitness, its issue could not be dodged. With the further story we are not now concerned, except to recall that it is the story of a reconstructed career. It is the record of how a palterer became a prince; of how a trickster became a son of God; of how 'when a man's ways please the Lord he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.'

3. This incident is then a picture of life as we may expect to find it during our own further

journeying. From whatever cause, in ourselves or outward events, it may be that we discover ourselves to-day apprehensive, fearful, anxious, uncertain and unsettled. Looking out we may see the immediate stretch of the high road, from which there can be no possibility of desertion, to be challenging and rough, beset with unavoidable difficulty and altogether unpromising of anything like happiness. Some of us may see the road before us taking a downward dip. Perhaps, too, we have already begun to find that it is actually harder and more laborious to go downhill than uphill. Then, for others, former enthusiasms have ebbed, and they have the handicap of impaired desire upon their going. Their onetime zest in those things that are commandingly Christian has somehow declined. Their resilience of mind and spirit is by no means what it was. Their interests have staled. The heart has gone out of things. And all of us know, only too well, that along the road, waiting for us just round the next corner, are the old, familiar difficulties—of ways and means, of financial insecurity, of undermined health, of irksome claims and duties. Anticipating the future in the light of past experiences, there are probably the usual tale of disheartening disappointments both with things and people, and the new consequences of old actions which, like Esau, will have to be faced up to somehow.

All of which may be true without being the whole truth. For there are angels in the path as well!

How do we know this? In the first place, because the Bible is full of it; unless, of course, we shut our eyes and our ears to its plain declarations and their meanings, and delude ourselves into believing that Bible days were somehow different from these days. It tells of angels who were in the pathway of Mary and Joseph, and of a group of shepherds, and of Peter, and Philip, and Cornelius, and John, and Paul. Not to mention the angels who ministered to Jesus in the wilderness and in the garden. And those others who heralded His resurrection and declared His coming again. And those also who rejoice over the return of penitent sinners to the fold and to the family of God. Nor is it the least of all its significant suggestions that it sets its stories of angels in every kind of circumstance and surrounding: in countryside and city streets, in ordinary homes

and lions' dens, in prisons and deserts and graveyards, and on high-roads and mountain-tops—all covering the widest range of our human situations and the entire scope of human need.

And we know, in the second place, that there are angels in the path, because, like Jacob, we have all experienced something akin to that which he passed through at Bethel twenty years before the event we are considering. We have all had our glimpses into Heaven at the foot of a ladder shaped like a Cross. Although, as with him, its influence may by this time have waned and now no longer affects us appreciably. And we know it, further, because, by every token and evidence on which faith can build, the activities of God's mercy, of His love and concern and kindly providence, are in no way governed by our fidelities. Nor are they affected by our lapses. Since God is, we may be very sure that His angels will meet us yet again.

4. How they will come to us who can tell? For they will choose their own times. And they will wear their proper disguises, having regard to their single intention, which is to mediate to us the manifold grace of God. They may meet us clad in the shining raiment of joy, in a new friendship, or an unlooked-for success, or in a crown set upon some hope or endeavour. On the other hand, they may come in the guise of some challenging responsibility, some staggering self-revelation, some over-turning of long-cherished plans and projects, some gripping anxiety. Or they may come wearing the sombre garb of grief and loss, of deprivation, of crippling limitation and compelling weakness, or even of death itself.

But anything that quickens conscience and awakens gratitude, that arouses lofty desire to action, that stimulates faith to activity and loyal endurance, and that thus sets us in the way of becoming better men and women, is clearly God's angel.

This does not mean that our spiritual life will necessarily be developed by a series of critical experiences. That is most certainly not the way of Christian growth. There are some people who seem able only to understand a God who works in overwhelming crises. Not for them is the steady, ordinary on-going to which the New Testament exhorts Christ's



followers. They must have emotional short-cuts to the fulfilment of their desires; though such, by the way, observation invariably identifies as being nothing more than delusive self-persuasions. For there are no short cuts along the straight road that leads to power, to character, to attainment. But, regardless of their own futile experiments in the past, they must have a God whom they can think of as ready to work for them in undertakings which do away with any obligation of personal application to His precepts on their part. A God of any other order they cannot, they really do not want to, recognize at all. But His angels come rather to company with us as the living channels of His peace, to perfect His strength in our weakness. They come to impart to us the grace of the Lord Christ, to lead us into ever-deepening fellowship with Him, and to guide us into increasingly meaningful contact with life as His witnesses.

¶ By elaborate use of the cinematograph, in combination with sensitive recording instruments, modern science has demonstrated the degree of force which must work in order slowly to push a growing plant through the earth-mould. It has made evident the fact that the development of a flowering bulb, or the bursting of a rose-bud into the beauty and fragrance of the full-opened rose, involves, for a like area, a greater propulsive power than that of high explosive! Which is one of Nature's many parables of the true life of men, the life that derives its interpretation and its inspiration alike from fellowship with God.

5. So let us fare forth unafraid! And let us be on the look-out for our angel helpers! Let our unchanging address in an ever-changing life be, henceforth, Mahanaim. It is a safe dwelling-place in a world of unrest and fear. From thence we shall go out as day succeeds day during the coming year to meet all that in our life is the equivalent of Jacob's encounter with Esau. And we shall not go alone, or unprepared. The mountains round about us are full of horses and chariots of fire.

¶ When, surrounded by hostile Arabs, General Gordon knew that the fall of Khartoum and his own capture and death were imminent, he wrote to his sister: 'The hosts are with me. This is Mahanaim!' To him the angels of God were at least as real as the foe outside the

fortress walls. He lived in an uninterrupted fellowship which banished and forbade fear.

Men say that they saw angels. Some may doubt

And others may explain;

But when strong foemen gather round about  
Who says that faith is vain?

That which a man has sown his hands must reap,

The choice may be his own:

Their watch the host of heaven still shall keep  
When we seem most alone.

Some clearly see, some wonder if they saw,

Not trusting human sight,

Clinging more closely to the common law,  
Dazed by the sudden light.

But in those hours of peril and of prayer—

Vision or sight or dream,

Seen or unseen the angel hosts are there,  
And God is still supreme.

## God and the Ordinary Man

Gen. xxxii. 10.—'I am not worthy.'

THAT is a phrase that occurs several times in Scripture. And upon each occasion, except one that we shall not forget, it betokens that an ordinary man like ourselves has found himself confronting God; stands there, breathless, abashed, very humble, suddenly grown conscious how crude his life is, how unworthy his whole character; yes, and determined upon better things. And it is worth noticing that this tense sense of God, this salutary shame, this inrush of new understanding that far more is due from him than he has ever even tried to give—this higher mood common to them all, is awakened by very different things in different minds.

1. The first time we hear this cry, 'I am not worthy!' it bursts from the heart of Jacob—not at all a religious man, you will agree, though in his youth, like most of us, he had at times seen visions, and dreamed dreams, and felt the unseen very real and near. But, as too often happens, for him that had died away

in those terrible flat levels of middle life. 'I see,' as Wordsworth says, 'by glimpses now; when age comes on, may scarcely see at all.' And, subsequently, all God's ingenuity and all the cunning discipline of things had failed to make any lasting impression on Jacob's queerly composite, but mainly sordid mind. 'God and the devil,' notes Bunyan of a character of his, 'pull for his soul.' But in Jacob's case that seemed all over, and the world had definitely won. For we read chapter after chapter in the centre of his life, and find ourselves in a squalid atmosphere, face to face with a man keen and alert concerning his own interests; by no means scrupulous; cheated at times, and himself on occasions cheating others without hesitation; a man rather crudely boastful of his own shrewdnesses, and yet a little soured because life has not given him all that he feels to be his due. There is much talk of flocks and herds and worldly plans and astute moves; but of God hardly a word. Newman declared that to gaze out on the world jostling and shoving eagerly about its own affairs, with not one trace of God in all its thoughts, gave him the same feeling as if he had looked in a mirror and not seen his own face. We shall look long enough into these central years of Jacob's life before we catch a glimpse of God. For him He has just faded out.

And then suddenly something happens. A cloud gathers, and throws a long, cold shadow. What he had won is jeopardized. And as he looks at his threatened possessions, he sees them all in a new light, and stands there dumb, awed, almost frightened, face to face with God once more.

Now, what brought that about was in its first beginning no spiritual cataclysm, no deep happening in his soul, but just a sudden recognition of the sheer goodness of God; of how, forgotten, He remembers and keeps heaping gifts with prodigal hands upon our undeserving. 'God,' says Emerson, 'enters into every life by a private door.' And the wicket through which He slipped into Jacob's was no tremendous spiritual experience (that came later), but just a wondering recognition of God's faithful kindness day by day. For Jacob, once he saw, never forgot. That moment made a lasting mark upon his heart and mind. From that day on, the thought of God was never far away from him. He was no saint, was never a

proficient in these holy things, was to the end a plain man leading a plain life, like most of us. But that blank in his soul is gone. For God is there, the background of his being all his latter years.

Is there not here a method by which some of us, too, might come into touch with Him, and that entirely naturally; a way by which religion might become real for some to whom, as things are, it is not? For, like Jacob, are we also never taken aback by God's faithful kindness; or, what is the same thing, by the fulness and the happiness of life? Are we never, like Stevenson, fairly staggered by it, till it seems a shocking thing to pray for more? Do we never, like a greater saint, hold up our unworthiness to God in confusion, feeling there must be some mistake? And in particular, do we never want some one to thank for it all? 'I am not worthy!' Who of us is? For think of even a few of the gifts He heaps on us so lavishly—this glorious earth, the hush of evening woods, the ever-changing glories of the heavens, the witchery of the flowers, the depth and the distance and the music of the waters, home and dear ones, the glorious glow of health, books and music, friends and love, work with its fascination to a sane mind, and leisure with its thronging interests, our own exalted place high up the scale of being, the senses, each of them another avenue that leads far out into another world of mystery and beauty, our minds, ours just because God willed it so; our conscience, that strange, august, imperious voice; the fact that we can look 'before and after,' aye, and up; that greatest of the three which Shakespeare forgot, but which the writer to Diognetus, a plain Christian man, remembered, 'To us alone He gave the privilege of looking upward to Himself.' Who of us would ever have expected these things? And yet all of them are ours. Let God see here is one child of His at least that frankly loves this Father's house in which it finds itself, and the heart that planned and gave it all. For that, too, is a very real religion. 'It is a comely fashion to be glad. Joy is the grace we say to God,' is in its essence a spiritual thing.

¶ After returning from a harvest thanksgiving service in his little village church Viscount Grey of Fallodon wrote: 'We had the hundred and eighteenth Psalm, and a fine chant for it; do you know the Psalm? It is



splendid and buoyant, and says things two or three or four times over, because it is so glad.'

2. Again, this phrase, 'I am not worthy,' twice breaks from men finding themselves face to face with Jesus Christ, and stunned by this amazement that has come into their lives. Of John the Baptist—no ordinary man, but a spirit so mighty that he awoke admiration even in our Lord—we shall say only this, that he provides one more proof of the fact that the bigger a soul is, the humbler does it feel in Jesus' presence. 'Tis the taught already that profit by teaching,' remarks Browning; it is those who know something about a subject who can see the genius of a master in it; and it is those who have made some progress in the art of living life and in knowledge of God who stand staring dumb with wonder at the splendour of Christ. It is indeed an ill sign that we can take Him so lightly. For if it is sheer tragedy that people lose Him so easily, stumbled by some petty doubt or difficulty that lies far out on the surface of things, throwing away all they might have because of such a stupid little nothing, still more amazing is it surely that we can accept Him so coolly, can believe that this is true, yet be so little moved by it. When Peter saw Christ's glory he cried out, 'Depart from me,' and even the Baptist shrank back, almost cowering. 'I am not worthy to unloose his shoes,' he said. But we take all Christ is, and all Christ does, and all Christ offers, as the merest thing of course. And yet if even Christ has grown commonplace, if even the Cross does not arrest and lay compulsion on us any longer, what is there left for God to try?

But let us rather speak of that other, the blunt soldier who so cheered the Master—again not a spiritual expert, just an ordinary man like any one of us. He was indeed a kindly soul—witness his goodness to his servant—and, even in those days of cold brutality, a man of a large sympathy for the subject people among whom he was quartered. 'He is worthy,' they kept urging upon Christ, 'for he loves our nation and has built us a synagogue.' But he himself thought otherwise, and had no doubt about it; felt that he, a product of the camp and field and the rough life of the army, had no fitness to meet Jesus Christ.

Perhaps we, too, feel that. We live in the

rush and press of things, sordid material things, and must live there. And though we look toward Christ with admiration, we feel that with plain, prosaic folk like us He can have no real friendship. Well, we are wrong. The Twelve were very ordinary men—not in the least like what they look in stained-glass windows, but very human—John with his temper, and Peter scared into hot oaths, and Thomas lagging so far behind that he could hardly keep our Lord in sight, wait for him how Christ might. And yet these men were very dear to Christ, and He owed very much to them, as He Himself told God, looking at them the while with eyes shining with gratitude. And we could be far more to Him, and do far more for Him than we have ever realized. Open the Gospels and you will see how much Christ owed to simple souls who hadn't much to give, but who gave what they had—a kindly greeting, a bit of faith, a trembling touch, a word of gratitude, a little hospitality—and Christ went on His way much cheered. And we could do that too.

¶ We owe our Scottish freedom to the fact that at the crisis of the battle the camp followers came rushing down the hill to fling themselves into the thick of it, whereat the enemy, thinking this a new army, broke and fled. Just what these unarmed menials meant to do against mailed knights and the terrible archery of England even they perhaps had not a notion. Only they couldn't keep out of it, could die at least, and so encumber the hostile advance by their dead bodies, piled in heaps. And doing what they could they have left a tremendous mark on history, and saved a nation's soul.

¶ 'It is the centurion who has marked the Mass with his "Domine, non sum dignus,"' says Paul Bourget. 'The soldier's words are repeated daily at the altar of the priest before the communion. The Army has the last word at the Holy Sacrifice.'

3: Once more, these same words, 'I am not worthy,' are the very cry with which the soul-sick and repentant prodigal turned back to his father—again a very ordinary man, who had made a sad mess of things, and knew it to his shame. And there are still many hearts that find their stumbling way to God by the hard road of the prodigal, or at least through

loss of self-respect, through the unhappy knowledge that they have failed, have not made of life what they should and could have done. An evil conscience is not an old-world memory but a grim fact. We may murder our self-respect and fling it out of sight, and laugh and sing, but one day, please God, the dead thing will rise and haunt us; will break in, like Banquo, on our revels and sit staring at us with its stony eyes. And then—what then? Better that terror than to have it shovelled out of sight in a forgotten grave.

Oh, dreadful is the check, intense the agony,  
When the ear begins to hear, and the eye begins  
to see;

When the pulse begins to throb, the brain to  
think again;

The soul to feel the flesh, and the flesh to feel  
the chain.

Yet I would lose no sting, would wish no  
torture less;

The more the anguish racks, the earlier will  
it bless,

And robed in fires of hell, or bright with  
heavenly shine,

If it but herald death, the vision is divine.

'O God!' cried Hamlet, 'I could be bounded in a nut-shell, and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.' Thank God for them! For you are not an insect to be satisfied with a cramped meagreness, but are meant for infinite things.

That heartache is home-sickness for the God for whom you were created, and who is your natural home. Arise, and go, and fling yourself upon your Father's grace, not seeking to evade punishment, not pleading to get off, leaving all that to Him, and asking only that He will not exile you to this horrible life you chose, that He will find some way to make some use even of you. And you will find the door is open, and the welcome warm and sure. 'Father, I am not worthy.' But you also He has interrupted with that glad, masterful, appropriating cry that blots out and begins afresh, 'My son! my son!'

¶ I saw a man of sixty, defeated by himself—moneyless, homeless, friendless—return to a Highland village to his mother's house. She was eighty-five; bed-ridden. The son stumbled

in with lowered eyes, stood beside her bed, but spoke never a word. And there was silence in that room, as in a glen where there is no burn. She broke it, and in a tone of almost caressing gentleness. 'My dear son,' she whispered, her frail hands reaching out to him, 'I am glad to see you—home.'<sup>1</sup>

## Wrestling with God

Gen. xxxii. 24.—'And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.'

LIKE most of the wonderful stories in the Old Testament this story of Jacob, wrestling at night by the margin of the stream, has lost none of its freshness. If we look at it with the eye of the critical historian, we find ourselves forced to admit that it belongs to that early period of tradition when facts were often given an imaginative and poetical form, so that we cannot take it literally. We often do a grave injustice to the poetry of the Bible by treating it as if it were strict history. But if we come to it seeking to pierce behind the outward form of the narrative to its inner spiritual meaning, we shall find that it takes us into that mysterious but profoundly real region, where the soul meets God and the great issues of character are determined.

1. This wrestling by the brook Jabbok—what was it? What does it mean? Let us see in it, first, the picture of a man wrestling with the ghost of his old self, with his past, with the habits and tendencies which had been forming in him for years. It is a picture of a man at a supreme crisis in his career. We feel that this night of struggle will make or mar him. If he loses, if the old self proves too strong, then the powers of evil will claim him for their own. If he wins, then a new future awaits him, and we cannot say to what heights of character he may rise. The turning point in Jacob's life has been reached. He is about to enter the land from which he had fled some twenty years previously in fear of his life. The meeting with Esau, whom he had tricked and wronged is being awaited by him with deep anxiety.

Picture him pacing alone by the side of the

<sup>1</sup> Alistair Maclean.



stream. He has made the necessary dispositions for the safety of his caravan in case his brother should prove hostile, and now he keeps his solitary, restless watch. Sleep was impossible. It was not only the threatened peril which drove away sleep. His conscience would not let him rest. His past came surging up into memory—all those acts of deceit, all that selfishness, all that disloyalty to what he knew was highest. So tremendous was the tension, the fight between the good and the bad within him, that he seems to himself to be wrestling with some unknown stranger. 'There wrestled a man with him till the breaking of the day.' All through the night the contest lasted. Jacob was in dead earnest. He meant to have done once and for all with that old self which had dogged his life.

When the fight begins within himself,  
A man's worth something.

So says Browning, that poet of the strenuous will. Jacob was worth something now, worth more in God's eyes, and in his own eyes, than he had ever been before. For he had come face to face with spiritual realities, and had steeled himself to dare greatly and do greatly in that fight which comes to us all, the fight with self and the living power of a past which in our best moments we hate.

2. Jacob wrestles so persistently that his opponent cannot overcome him, till by some mysterious touch he overpowers his natural strength. 'He touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was strained, as he wrestled with him.' That touch gave Jacob a new understanding of his rival. Here was some Divine visitant, no mere man, but a spiritual presence. Here was God, the same God who had shown him the gracious vision at Bethel, refusing to let him alone, striving for his soul. We said that we have in this story the picture of a man wrestling with the ghost of his old self. It is truer to say that it is a picture of a man wrestling with God. For in our spiritual struggles the higher which calls to us to follow is God. When conscience accuses us God is speaking. When we see a vision of ourselves, as we might be, and as we hope one day to become, God inspires that vision in our souls. When our wills awake and

we brace ourselves to do some neglected duty, or conquer some persistent temptation, the motive power comes from Him. And so Jacob wrestled all through the night with God. The higher and lower selves were in conflict, and the higher self was just God who wanted to save Jacob's soul, and came to him in awe and mystery that He might impress upon him the value of his spirit made in the Divine likeness.

Who knows when legions, angel, ghost, or  
djinn,

Shall break from out the backgrounds vast  
that bind

Our cramped horizon, and o'errun the scene,

Or God Himself crash upon us mummings  
blind,

And play be done, and life, life, life begin!

3. Let us note the issue of this long-drawn struggle. Wounded in the thigh, his natural strength paralysed by the Divine touch, Jacob is a beaten man. He knows it; but he has a beaten man's resource left, and he uses it. He cannot struggle any more, but he can cling. And he clings so tenaciously to his opponent that the latter asks to be freed. 'Let me go for the day breaketh.' The mystery of his being might be dispelled in the daylight, and he would rather leave Jacob with a mystery to ponder over. But Jacob will let him go only on one condition. 'I will not let thee go except thou bless me.' Had he not come from the heavenly places; and if so, had he not a blessing to give? Jacob, bruised and tired and lame, had enough persistence to cling to his foe—now seen to be a friend in disguise—until he wrung from him the blessing. 'And he blessed him there.' And what a blessing it was! It was the blessing of a changed name; but name in the Bible stands for character. No more was he to be called Jacob—deceiver; but Israel—the Perseverer with God, the Perseverer who prevailed. Yes; the fight was over. Jacob had conquered the baser elements in his character. The old tendencies no doubt would assert themselves again; for we cannot blot out our past in a minute; but they would never dominate the character. The set, the direction of his life was changed—and it is the direction which matters.

4. Jacob's struggle comes to us all; not

necessarily in the shape of a single great crisis which determines the future career, though that often happens, and we call it 'conversion.' But the struggle is something which none of us can avoid. Life's deepest meaning lies in it. Always for every soul of man is there the choice between the lower and the higher. Always what we may become is challenging what we are. And for us all God is present in the struggle. At times the temptation comes to say, 'Is it really God? Are not moral ideals mere human conventions made for the more stable ordering of society? Is it not just pious fancy that sees them issuing from an eternal Fount of Personal Goodness? Why should I trouble; why not go with the crowd and enjoy life while I have it?' Often that is a dishonest doubt, born of sophistry and the desire to have a good time. We know whether we are doubting honestly or not. But sometimes it is a sincere doubt; and it is the most painful doubt which can come to us, for it is doubt about the very foundations of life, about the ultimate realities. If that doubt comes, there is no better way in which to fight it down than by resolutely affirming our own worth as spiritual beings. Let us say to ourselves, 'Here am I with my conscience, my sense of right and wrong, my need of God, my will with which I can shape my course. Here am I standing in the stream of a great tradition about God. I will be true to it, true to what I know is right, I will fight my doubt down by making God a great reality in my life. I will never give way to the unworthy suggestion that moral ideals are illusions and that there is no Voice of God calling to me to aspire.'

5. According to the story, Jacob did not win till his natural strength was paralysed. When the stranger touched his thigh he was rendered helpless; and yet that was the moment when victory began to come within his grasp. For then he clung to his opponent, and wrested the blessing from him. In his weakness, as St Paul also found, his strength was made perfect. He was right to fight hard, to use all his force in the struggle. We have to put out all our powers in the fight with sin. Yet he was more right when he put himself in a passive attitude and sought for a blessing from God. Do not we often fail because we rely on our own strength, and neglect to seek

the greater aid of God? Christianity is a religion of life and power. It tells of God waiting to quicken human life by His spiritual energy.

¶ Referring to the diary which he kept for many years, Dr Percy Gardner wrote: 'In reading it I find expressed my unfailing conviction that anything I have done which was good was due to the constant help of God; and that when I fell away, as I so often did, from reliance on that help, my life at once began to slide down to a lower level, and my usefulness to diminish. I am sure that the experience I report is a real thing.'

'I will not let thee go except thou bless me.' Have we ever said that to Jesus Christ? As we walk by the margin of life's stream, there comes to us a strange wrestler. He comes in many fashions—in the haunting memories of wrong things done in the past, in conscience, in the agonizing hour of bereavement, in the discipline of ill-health; but in whatever form He comes, He is one and the same wrestler—Jesus Christ, who everlastingly wrestles that He may save the souls of men. How do we treat Him when He wrestles with us? Do we ask Him to go away; or do we welcome the Divine truth which humbles us and takes away all our self-sufficiency, and renders our natural strength powerless, so that its place may be taken by His greater might? Surely we know by bitter experience that we fail when we rely on our own strength. Let us cling to Him, and ask Him to bless us.

Thou knowest, Lord, that we alone  
Should surely fail;  
We have no wisdom of our own  
That could prevail;  
Yet Thou, through human helplessness,  
Canst work Thy will—canst help and bless.

Take these weak hands, and hold them, Lord;  
Our Helper be.  
In Thee is all our fulness stored;  
We come to Thee,  
And know that, by Thy Spirit's might,  
We must be victors in the fight.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> E. H. Divall.



## The Persistent Purpose

Gen. xxxii. 26.—‘I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.’

THIS is one of the many arresting sayings in which the Bible is so rich—sayings that write themselves for ever on the heart of mankind, and may become the guiding principle, the final epitome, of a human life. The saying is a paradox, for it defies reason by treating an obvious enemy as a disguised friend; but in this apparent inconsistency it ranks with other memorable paradoxes of the Bible. The helpless and agonized father, appealing to Jesus for the restoration of his son, cried, ‘I believe; help thou mine unbelief.’ Simon Peter, at once attracted and repelled by the discovery of the unsuspected majesty of his teacher-friend, instinctively prays, ‘Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.’ There is a paradox even on the lips of the Lord, in that perplexing cry of the Cross, which appeals to the very Father who seems to have withdrawn from His Son, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’

The unforgettable cry of Jacob has a not less memorable setting. We think of the dark torrent rushing through the ravine, and the dangerous ford by which Jacob’s company have crossed. We see this man of mingled purposes lingering behind, as though reluctant to meet again the brother he wronged so many years before. Then, in the darkness of the night, there comes the lonely struggle with the stranger, that desperate encounter for very life, the agonized effort, and the grim discovery by Jacob that the stranger is stronger than he. It is a defeated man who somehow penetrates to the hope of a friend behind the fact of a foe, and appeals to a hidden power and will to save and not to destroy: ‘I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.’ What is the real meaning of a story so impressive and so suggestive as this?

1. One of the first discoveries we make in the great adventure of life is of *life’s inevitabilities*. As soon as the little child begins to assert himself, he must learn that there is a world of objects round him which do not yield to his will. Unless he is to be that unhappy thing, a spoilt child, he will also discover a

world of boys and girls, men and women, who do not always give way to him, whose wills must often assert themselves over his. When he is old enough to form his ambitions and plan his career, he is apt to forget the lessons he has learnt in other realms, and to ignore the inevitabilities of life. Life is a bigger and more brutal thing than we thought, and it seems strangely regardless of our own desires. We are like an artist, learning to work on some material that seems to forbid his purpose, till he has found out how to shape that purpose to the inevitabilities of his material, and make the marble yield the living form. Many a homely proverb, many a saying of the wise, teach us these stern laws of life, which reflect and continue Nature’s sequence of cause and effect. We learn that bad work will follow us as long as we live, that every debt we incur must sooner or later be paid, that the lost opportunity never recurs, that the past is irrevocable.

These are the realities of life, and until we learn them there is no reality in our religion. We do not really cry to God for help, we do not really pray, until we find something against which we are powerless, something from which we seek to be delivered, and from which we cannot save ourselves. The spiritual agonies through which a man must sooner or later go, if he does not drug himself by work or pleasure into unconsciousness of the real meaning of life, are the birth-hours of true and genuine religion. The ancient world saw its terrors gathered up into the forms of demons and evil spirits, and cried for deliverance from these. The modern world has brushed these forms of thought aside, but there still remains the sense of life’s inevitabilities from which they sprang. There is still the handicap of some physical weakness that robs us of the prize of life when it seemed within our grasp; there is still the consciousness of the divided heart, the grip of some temptation that will not let us go, or the scars of the old sin that will not be forgotten; there is still the great mystery of death. The proudest of us lives to learn that he is beaten and humiliated by something that is greater than himself, and unless he did learn it, he would remain an untaught fool, though all the intellectual wisdom of the ages were his.

¶ Henry Drummond declared, ‘I have gone

into the heart of Africa, and when I have opened the curtain of my tent in the morning, the first face I saw was the hideous face of my own temptation. Go where you will you cannot avoid that.'

2. The faith that gives the victory over these inevitabilities of life is that which sees them transformed by *God's initiatives*, that approach of God to man in and through all these things which gives to them a changed meaning. This does not mean an evasion of them, a mere flight from them. A good deal of what passes for religion is a running away from facts. These things are facts, and the only way in which their inevitability can be overcome is by changing their meaning. The Cross of Christ is the greatest example of this. In itself, it meant the inevitable end of a dreamer beating against the bars of the stern facts of life—for how could the lonely prophet of Nazareth hope to escape the cowardice, the selfishness, the prejudice, the spiritual blindness, which crucified Him? Yet the Cross of Christ was transformed by a new meaning when men saw it in the light of a victorious purpose, crowned by God, when they saw it as the measure of the world in which they lived, and of the love of God which was seeking to save that world. The Cross is a transformed inevitability. In such transformation of meaning we have the new fact, as real as the old, and more powerful. God's greatest work is from within, rather than without, for this personal experience is the realm of His Holy Spirit.

¶ The story is told that once, as a young man, Charles Spurgeon was preaching about the martyr Stephen. His sermon was suddenly interrupted by a question from an unbeliever, who shouted: 'What did God do to help Stephen when he was being stoned to death?' That was a shrewd thrust. What *did* God do? He did not turn the stones aside. He did not carry Stephen away to safety. Spurgeon had an answer, indeed *the* answer, ready. He replied, 'God enabled Stephen to pray, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."'<sup>1</sup>

The power of the Spirit of God to transform the meaning of life for us comes through God's own initiative. We love, because He first loved us. It is in and through the grace of Jesus Christ that we discover the God who has come

out to meet us, sinners as we are, not in wrath but in holy love. A prophet pictures Israel's God as coming forth from Zion across the wilderness to seek His people, saying, 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.' This is a prophecy of the parable of the Prodigal Son, and of the revelation of the Father in the Gospel and Cross of Jesus Christ. Phillips Brooks put the emphasis in the right place when he answered the question as to what had been the secret of his life by saying, 'Less and less, I think, grows the consciousness of seeking God. Greater and greater grows the certainty that He is seeking us and giving Himself to us to the complete measure of our present capacity.' Through the discovery of Him who has come out to meet us, we gain the new confidence that plucks victory from defeat, and share the new spirit that transforms life and life's inevitabilities.

¶ A writer tells of a woman he visited in hospital who was dying of cancer. She was neither resentful nor dully submissive. She was bearing the cross in the spirit that redeems. 'I wish I could gather up all the pain which people suffer through this disease,' she said, 'and bear it for them.'<sup>1</sup>

3. But the power of God's initiatives to transform the meaning of life's inevitabilities is conditioned by *man's persistencies*. If it is in the spirit of man that the victory has to be won, that spirit must be made God's. Now, it is our very nature that we cannot be made good or brought into fellowship with God against our desire. That is His own law—the law He has laid down in making man in His own image. But our need of Him must not be the passing wish of a moment, a sentimental longing, the base expedient of insincerity or cowardice. It must be a persistent purpose that learns to cry, out of the darkness and the apparent defeat, 'I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.' Try to take that as a bit of prosaic logic, and you make nonsense of it. How can man constrain God? How can man win his best victory by defeat? Yet that paradox is true of the highest and deepest things—that they pass beyond our reasonings, and prove themselves by our experience of them. It is enough that we have caught a

<sup>1</sup> H. W. Theobald.

<sup>1</sup> James Reid.



glimpse of something beyond the appearance of things, a glimpse that comes and goes, perhaps, and leaves us desperately wondering whether we have seen anything at all—and yet a glimpse that gives us the courage and hope to go on, and teaches us to see the truth of the saying, 'Tisn't life that matters. 'Tis the courage you bring to it.'

It would seem that the supreme witness that we belong to God is in our persistent purpose not to let Him go; and this is true, if we rightly understand what we are saying. It does not mean that we find assurance in our unaided effort, or even in the moral strength by which we do go on. On the contrary, it is just the fear that we shall soon let go that makes us afraid. The truth is rather that in this close and desperate grip on God we discover the yet closer grip of God on us. We shall not let Him go—because He will not let us go. He has us in His power; He has taught us our weakness; and now He will show us His strength. The proof of all this is not in any text of Scripture, though the promises of Scripture may point the way; not in any testimony of other men, though we may learn from them what and where to seek. The proof must come new and clear to our own hearts in this inner consciousness of a struggle with God Himself. We thought it was a struggle with an enemy, we find that an unknown friend is holding us. The persistency of our own purpose is, indeed, a frail and unsafe thing; but what if it is the witness of His Spirit in us, the proof of His purpose? This is where the innermost transformation of the Spirit is wrought—when He convinces us that within our wavering, despairing purpose there is God's own purpose concealed. Then we see that His grace is perfected in our weakness. We learn the truth which underlies the testimony of Israel's prophets, and indeed of all who witness for God—that ours is somehow God's and therefore God's is ours.

Let every one take courage to go on, for if his heart cried to God, 'I will not let thee go, except thou bless me,' it is God who utters that cry in him, and that cry is the proof that he *will* be blessed.

## Thy Name is Love

Gen. xxxii. 29.—'And Jacob asked him, and said Tell me, I pray thee, thy name.'

Come, O Thou Traveller unknown,  
Whom still I hold but cannot see;  
My company before is gone,  
And I am left alone with Thee;  
With Thee all night I mean to stay,  
And wrestle till the break of day.

Yield to me now, for I am weak,  
But confident in self-despair;  
Speak to my heart, in blessings speak;  
Be conquered by my instant prayer.  
Speak, or Thou never hence shalt move,  
And tell me if Thy Name is Love.

1. Jacob's request to be told the Divine Name is surely the same as that which is made by many amongst ourselves. The facts of life are very far from being homogeneous. There are, indeed, many evidences of design—of all the direct arguments for the existence of God that from design is probably the strongest and most cogent. Yet there is also in Nature that which has the appearance of being purposeless, and few would say that 'see with eye serene' the presence of design everywhere. There are, too, signs and testimonies of loving kindness and compassion; but there are also grim and ugly facts which suggest indifference and even cruelty.

¶ John Stuart Mill's indictment of Nature and her tortures is well-known: 'Nature impales men, breaks them as if on the wheel, casts them to be devoured by wild beasts, burns them to death, crushes them with stones like the first Christian martyr, starves them with hunger, freezes them with cold, poisons them by the quick or slow venom of her exhalations, and has hundreds of other hideous deaths in reserve. . . . Her explosions of fire damp are as destructive as human artillery; her plague and cholera far surpass the poison cups of the Borgias.'<sup>1</sup>

There may well have been events in our own lives, or in the lives of our friends or acquaintances, which appear to us difficult or impossible to reconcile with omnipotence and perfect love. It is this confused and contradictory aspect of

<sup>1</sup> *Three Essays on Religion*, 29 f.

life that makes the question, 'What is there behind phenomena?' one of such difficulty and yet of such pressing importance. There are hours when the problems connected with our life here and with the world in which we are placed press upon us with a weight that is almost intolerable, when we feel that some solution of them is imperative unless all our peace of mind and strength of character are to be shattered and destroyed. Is there a Personal God—One in whom is perfect Personality? May we attribute to Him alike stainless holiness, and absolute supremacy? Or must we fall back upon some modification of the theistic position and try to find satisfaction in the thought of God as One whose goodness is complete, but whose power is incomplete? Or is pantheism, or atheism, after all the answer to the question which generation after generation puts to itself? Or is it a question which admits of no answer?

'Tell us thy name'—Thy Nature, Thy character. Tell it to us that we may know what to hope for, what to fear, by what principles to live, what ideals to cherish, what visions to shut out, that we may be able to distinguish between the lights that are true and reliable and 'the gleam that beckons and betrays.' Tell it to us that we may know what really to think about moral and physical evil, about disasters by sea and land, about war and disease and famine, about sin and pain, about death and the dissolution of the body. So we ask—ask in the days of early manhood or womanhood, when we are endeavouring to lay down the lines along which our lives shall run—ask in later years not less earnestly as we draw rapidly closer to the inevitable end. But it often seems as though there were no answer at all, or at best an answer that is indistinct and unintelligible. It appears as though an answer to a fundamental question was being unnecessarily and unreasonably withheld.

2. Yet it is surely the case that the answer to our question is not really withheld. We may apply the familiar saying: 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.'

The agonizing perplexities as to the nature of God, or as to His existence, which sadden and dishearten some and madden others, can only come to those upon whom Christianity has no real hold. It is obvious that they will not

be helped by any appeal to the gospel of Christ and to the proofs supplied by it of the Divine mercy and affection. So for the moment let us put Christianity aside and see whether we cannot find the much-needed aid elsewhere.

What is the conception against which some have struggled in the supposed interests of religion? Is it not the conception of the absolute and inviolable supremacy of law? They have seen in seeming breaches of law—in what is colloquially called the miraculous—signs and examples of God's working. 'Look,' they have said, 'here is God, and here.' Yet it is in our reliance upon the universe as rational, orderly, coherent—as exempt from any liability to be broken into by what is arbitrary or capricious—that we have the revelation of God's existence and of His Name. For the whole notion of a universe which is essentially trustworthy rests upon faith in an omnipotent God of perfect moral integrity. If we may apply some words which have been used of a well-known theory of causation: 'If there is no such God, not only is there no reason to expect that the sun will rise to-morrow, but there is no reason to suppose that in five minutes' time we shall expect it to rise to-morrow.' Yet to such an extent and degree of scepticism no one really goes. We are so constituted that total scepticism is impossible. None of us is prepared to face the uncertainty, the terror, the despair which such a frame of mind would induce. It is not only that we insist upon a sure basis for science, but we assume in our daily careers—in all the actions which we commit between sunrise and sunset—even in lying down to sleep—that the laws of the universe, so far as known, can be implicitly relied upon. But how is such a reliance to be justified if there be no Personal God, or if He be a God of doubtful benevolence, of uncertain purpose, of limited power?

3. If it is essential to postulate God—One perfect in wisdom, power, and righteousness—then surely we cannot refuse to attribute to Him that capacity for limitless love that Christianity has always assigned to Him. If it is reasonable to believe in God at all can it be unreasonable to believe about Him the best possible? And can there be anything to believe about Him better than that He is love? Indeed, would the postulate of a morally



perfect God be satisfied by One who was either loveless or deficient in the power of loving? Would such a Deity afford any such guarantee of order and coherence as we have seen to be required, if we are to be able to save ourselves from falling into a fathomless abyss of scepticism. 'Thy Nature and Thy Name is Love.' It is the highest and sublimest conception of God of which human thought is capable. We have been led to it by a road which is not distinctively Christian. Yet Christianity corroborates the conclusion to which we have come. 'Tell me, I pray thee, thy name'; and in answer the Church of Christ points the enquirer to one of three crosses raised near Jerusalem and to Him who hangs there. 'God so loved the world.' If once we really believe in a morally perfect God—One in whom 'is no darkness at all'—we shall cease to look upon any such self-manifestation as that of which the Gospels tell us as essentially incredible. It is, of course, the argument which has been worked out with such extraordinary dramatic power by Browning in his *Saul*.

Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst thou—so wilt thou!  
 So shall crown thee the topmost, ineffablest,  
 uttermost crown—  
 And thy love fill infinitude wholly, nor leave  
 up nor down  
 One spot for the creature to stand in! . . .  
 . . . O Saul, it shall be  
 A Face like my face that receives thee; a  
 Man like to me,  
 Thou shalt love and be loved by, for ever:  
 a Hand like this hand  
 Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee!  
 See the Christ stand!

'And thy love fill infinitude wholly!' It is to faith in that perfect and infinite love—that love which can never fail nor betray—that God is inviting us through our reliances upon the rationality of the world. There is much that we can only explain—and even then the explanation, it may be, falls short of sufficiency—by supposing that in the evolution of the universe God has voluntarily associated with Himself created spirits—amongst them men and women. How far that association goes, or is intended to go, who can tell? There is a certain amount which we cannot explain at all,

and with respect to which we must be content to admit our ignorance. But what real cause have we to lose heart, and to look to some form of infidelity as 'the conclusion of the whole matter'? It is no pious, but irrational, fancy that the Divine love is ever about us, that it is a possession of which we need never doubt the reality. That love is with us always, if only we will surrender ourselves to it in grateful trust and in earnest co-operation. There is here no question of a contest between reason and faith. If theism falls, reason collapses with it. And what theism can be worth having which does not declare in no uncertain tones that 'God is love'? That is the name of God.

'Tis love! 'tis love! Thou diedst for me!  
 I hear Thy whisper in my heart;  
 The morning breaks, the shadows flee;  
 Pure universal love Thou art;  
 To me, to all, Thy mercies move;  
 Thy Nature and Thy Name is Love.

### Where God breaks Through

Gen. xxxiii. 10.—'I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God.'

1. No greater tribute than this could be paid by one man to another. The strange thing is that it was paid by a religious man to a brother who was not religious. For Jacob, with all his ugly faults was a religious man; whereas Esau was a pagan—a rough, lusty man of the desert. Yet it was of this man that Jacob said, 'I have seen thy face as it had been the face of God.'

What made him feel and say this? Jacob had recently passed through the radical experience of the Jabbok, an experience that had worked in him a profound alteration of character. On that night his conscience had been awakened. God spoke to him and convinced him of the shame and sordidness of the wrong he had committed against his brother. He had been brought to a sense of sin. He had never realized this before, and he was crushed and broken by it. Full of this new shame and the old fear, he set out to meet Esau. But when Esau saw him he ran and fell upon his neck and kissed him; asked all sorts of questions about his family, his children, and his earthly

fortunes, and appeared not to have harboured any resentment towards his brother. The wrong had been forgiven. And with Esau's forgiveness there came to Jacob the sense of God's forgiveness. The love of God broke out on that rugged weather-beaten face like sunlight through a thunder cloud. And Jacob burst out, 'I have seen thy face as it had been the face of God.'

2. This brings to our minds the fact that God is made real to people by people. Nature can do something to reveal Him. But Nature has no heart. God can speak to us in flowers only when we know that it is He who speaks. It needs a human heart to reveal Him fully.

¶ Dr H. Van Dusen tells a story of a young man who returned home after a somewhat long absence. 'As his key turned the latch and he entered the front door, he was greeted by silence. He climbed slowly to the second-floor room where, day by day and year by year, he had been accustomed to be met by a familiar figure and a familiar voice of welcome. Everything in that room was precisely as he had expected to find it. There on the table were books and magazines piled in customary fashion. On the desk was a vase of flowers, its arrangement suggesting fingers with a peculiarly delicate touch. Each chair and ornament was in its usual place. There was almost a distinctive aroma in the room. In one corner was the great armchair where the figure habitually sat, and beside it some needlework as though just laid down. It was all exactly as he had expected. Everything in that room, everything, was a "revelation" of his mother. But—the chair was empty; there was no hearty voice in greeting; the figure was not there.'

<sup>1</sup> In the Bible God speaks as in no other book. But even there it is through men He speaks. It is through what men have felt and said and done and been. This is seen most of all in the fact that He sent Christ, a Man like ourselves. He showed us 'His glory in the face of Jesus Christ.' Only thus could He show us His very self.

It is very comforting to think what this means. God can best be known to us through a Man, One who worked as a carpenter, who went in and out of humble homes and took little children on His knee. We might almost

<sup>1</sup> *The Plain Man Seeks for God.*

call it the homeliness of God. In all that is best in us, He is like ourselves. That is indeed what Christ said. He told us to picture God in the light of what is best in ourselves, and we would be right.

3. But this means that it is by people such as us that God breaks through to others. In a sense we are the only people who can make Him real to the great indifferent multitude. If they are to see Him at all they must see Him in our lives. If they are to understand how holy and loving and forgiving God is, they must learn it by seeing those very qualities in us. There have been men and women who have so lived that people have seen God in them and been led to adore and worship Him.

¶ In that well-nigh forgotten novel, *Robert Elsmere*, a working man is made to say of the man who laboured with such devotion amongst the poor, 'I have seen God in you.'

¶ Dr James Stalker used to tell a story about a young lad who applied to him for membership in his church, and when asked what made him wish to give himself to Christ he replied quite simply that it was the Christian character of the foreman under whom he worked that had drawn him.

It is a startling thing to realize that our treatment of others may be helping or hindering their experience of God. It ought to make us very careful. It should keep us living near to Christ where the spirit of love can be learned. We are always meeting people whose hearts are ready for the healing or the comforting that can make God's love real.

4. It was in Esau's forgiveness that God got through to Jacob. Our forgiveness of others has more power to manifest God than anything else we do. For when we forgive, love is victorious in us over the spirit of evil at its worst. In that forgiving love God's grace shines through.

The diary of the Japanese criminal, who was called 'A Gentleman in Prison,' makes this clear. He had been given a New Testament, and one night took it up to read it. He opened it at the Sermon on the Mount, but was not deeply touched. But later he began to read the story of the trial and crucifixion of Christ. When he read how Christ on the Cross prayed for His enemies, he said he felt 'his heart



stabbed as if by a five-inch nail.' Here is One being slain though He is innocent, and by those He had tried to help. And on His Cross He prays for them. This can be no other than God. So he reasoned. But it was more than reasoning. The Divine love released in that forgiving spirit of Christ had found him and won him. He saw in the face of the Crucified the face of God.

Can God's forgiveness ever really get through to people unless we forgive them? It is very doubtful if it can. This is the true absolution—our forgiveness of those who have wronged us, our friendship with those who have sinned. It is not always easy. We sometimes tell ourselves we must wait till they are penitent. But God did not wait for that when He sent Jesus. Our Lord came and died on the Cross, breathing forgiveness, in order to awaken the penitent spirit. And it happened. For the dying thief heard the prayer and saw on His face the love which pain and malice could not kill. God became real to him there and then. He saw that Face as it had been the face of God.

¶ When Edmund Campion was lying in prison waiting to be hanged, drawn, and quartered, George Eliot, an apostate and spy, who had trapped Campion and brutally treated him, came on the eve of the execution into the cell of Campion, trembling, begging Campion to protect him against the rage of the people for his part in the arrest. Campion, without one word of rebuke, promised him a letter of introduction to a German duke who would accept his service. The gaoler present at the conversation was so overwhelmed by the act that he was converted to the faith by that supernatural virtue of forgiveness.<sup>1</sup>

## Bethel Revisited

Gen. xxxv. 6, 7.—'So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Beth-el, he and all the people that were with him. And he built there an altar, and called the place El-Beth-el: because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother.'

1. OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES has described one curious experience which is by no means uncommon. You suddenly become aware that you have been before in just these present

<sup>1</sup> A. E. Whitham.

circumstances. When it happened, and where, you cannot tell; but you recollect the situation which is now repeating itself 'as if you had lived it or dreamed it, as if you had acted or schemed it, long ago.' It is like a quotation from a previous chapter in your book of life. The hidden springs of memory have been stirred by the magic of association.

There are two pathways along which remembrance chiefly loves to travel. It reaches us through the associations of time or the associations of place. Time itself is like a rhythm which repeats, a cycle which recurs. The seasons bring us back to where we began. We grow wise as God teaches us to number our days, and to keep humbly and thankfully, each one for himself, those anniversaries that are registered in the calendar of his own soul. Year by year the great common festivals come round. Christmas itself carries grey-haired men and women back to their childhood. Our soldiers in trench and billet and lonely outpost, our seamen cruising over dangerous waters, all send their hearts wistfully homeward, where the feast must be kept once more with vacant chairs.

Who has not felt the strange, enduring attraction which haunts any place where he once lived and loved and laboured? That spell draws the exile from a far country back to the village where he was born. He climbs the hill that overlooks it, and all the landscape underneath is full of gracious memories. The dreary years that lie between are abolished, and he is a lad at home once more, and the blessed dead stand by his side smiling as they used to smile, long ago. He turns his feet towards the place where they lie, where the grass is green. He enters the little empty chapel and sits down once more in his father's pew. There week by week he knelt to worship, and learned how to draw near to God. There he made his early vow of consecration, and took for the first time the communion of the Body and Blood of Christ. He prays again the old prayer of penitence and self-surrender. Even so, Jacob came again to Bethel, where God had appeared to him at the first, and he built there an altar, and God appeared unto Jacob again, and blessed him there.

2. Times had changed with the patriarch since first he halted at Bethel. Then he was a

homeless fugitive, escaping from the penalties of his own deceit ; and when darkness overtook him he lay down on the bare ground, with a stone for his pillow. But the power of the Highest overshadowed him while he slept, and he had vision of the way that leads from earth to heaven, and heard the Eternal Voice speaking clearly in his soul. There God met him and God claimed him, and there on the morrow Jacob gave himself up in covenant to God. And at length, after many years, he came back to the solemn scene of his early vision and vow. He was a shepherd chieftain now, rich in flocks and herds and children. He had lived through toil and disappointment and success. His early self-surrender had not been wholly kept. That fatal duplicity which betrayed his brother clung to Jacob in a distant land, and only after sharp chastening was he cured of his besetting sin. But God never forsook him, any more than He forsakes us. Though we be faithless, He follows us as we wander and abides with us where we enter in ; He still goes on patiently to finish His work. The lesson which Jacob learned at Bethel was repeated and deepened at Peniel, where he who had beheld the Lord in a vision of the night wrestled with Him till the breaking of the day, and won the blessing and the name of a prince with God.

So, with ripened experience and purified heart, Jacob was brought back to the place which must have been sacred to him as that other place on the road to Damascus was sacred to St. Paul. Outwardly, there was nothing at Bethel to attract passers-by, nothing to distinguish the ridge of the bare hillside—except a cairn of crumbling stones which a wayfaring man had piled long years before, to mark the place where he had seen heaven opened. But as Jacob approached, he made ready as though to enter on holy ground. His family still cherished some relics of half-heathen worship ; but Jacob gathered these together and buried them out of sight. Humbly, penitently, reverently, he came again to Bethel, where God had appeared to him at the first—came to build his altar and bind his sacrifice anew, came to receive a fresh revelation and a fresh blessing on the scene of the old, came to find his God even nearer to him than ever. That altar was the outward sign of the spiritual consecration wherewith Jacob ratified the vow

he had made at Bethel so many years before.

3. The believing Christian has always a Bethel of his own. We can remember what it was like—perhaps a humble church, a narrow room, a nameless spot among the quiet fields, unrecognized by any other soul. But we have not forgotten—there is a cairn in memory to mark it—that place where we first came face to face with God, and trembled at His awful nearness, and heard His call, and gave ourselves up in surrender to His love. With us also times are changed since then, and circumstances, and we ourselves are altered. Our early vows have not been unbroken. Our dearest treasures have been taken away. Few pilgrims end their journey with all the simple faith and sunny hope and generous charity with which they began. Yet in spite of everything, we can never forget that we have been at Bethel once. We have seen heaven opened. We heard God's voice and felt His love and yielded to His claim and gave ourselves up to His will. We also can come back again in spirit to Bethel, humbly and thankfully, to rebuild our altar and renew our vows.

¶ Have you forgotten, asks Bunyan, the byre and the lane and the like where God met with you—the first Communion, the last night in the old home, that illness when you learned how tender God's touch is, that joy that made you ashamed and humbled you before His feet ? Ah ! we have wandered far since then ; and many a cloud has obscured the stars by which we were to steer ! We have lost sight of the great plans we once drew for life, and have run up a mean, rough deal, ramshackle structure after all, have let the world convince us, have fallen tamely into step, doing what others do, and living as they live ! And to-day God is calling us to put away the strange gods that have crept into our soul ; to go back to the lost ideals, that were not foolishness but wisest wisdom ; to the old singleness of heart and aim, to the undivided loyalty that had time to work for Christ and live for Him ; when God, who has grown so dim and shadowy to us in these latter years, was the one fact of all facts for us ; when we lived in a world thrilling and instinct with His manifest presence, full of the ministry of angels, of hands that helped, and powers that worked for us, and strong



grace always following and hovering above us in our need.<sup>1</sup>

Once more,  
After long years of exile, may I turn  
Back to the land where ancient altars burn,  
And hallowed memories dwell.  
Where on the windings of a secret shore,  
The murmuring surges sink and swell  
For evermore.

Once more,  
Stretch Thy sustaining hands from heaven's  
high dome  
Over the wanderer as he wanders home ;  
Let their far brightness gleam,  
Making my life that lies before  
A something better than a sultry dream ;  
Forgive once more.

### Deborah the Nurse

Gen. xxxv. 8.—' But Deborah Rebekah's nurse died, and she was buried beneath Beth-el under an oak : and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth.'

THE pages of the Bible contain many thumb-nail sketches—biographical fragments that leave much to the imagination. Among these we may place Deborah—not Deborah the prophetess who ruled Israel with such intrepid courage in the days of the Judges, but Deborah, the nurse of Rebekah.

She is mentioned only once before, and then even her name is not given. We are told that when Abraham's servant sought the hand of Rebekah on behalf of Isaac, her brothers ' sent away Rebekah, their sister, and her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men.' That is all we know of Deborah. She followed her young mistress when she left her father's house to make the great ventures in life and love ; she remained in the service of Isaac's household long after the death of her mistress.

¶ The word ' Deborah ' means a bee ; and the memory of her who bore this significant name in the far-off ages is like the little bee found in the coffin of the Pharaoh, that had been attracted by the flowers before the lid was fastened down, and was thus shut in with the mummied dead, and shared in the same immortality.

<sup>1</sup> A. J. Gossip.

1. So far as we can see Deborah gave up everything—friends, home, familiar scenes and associations—to identify herself absolutely with the family of Isaac and Rebekah, and whether the renunciation was voluntary or compulsory, the fact of it remains. Their joys were her joys, their sorrows her sorrows. When Rebekah drew near to death, the old nurse who had watched over her as a little child tended her with every care, and when Rebekah died the old woman's heart was ready to break. But Deborah lingered on, and a new generation sprang up around her, and Jacob's children clambered on her knees. Then when Jacob went back to Bethel to renew his youthful vows, Deborah died.

The type of Deborah is not yet extinct. In many homes—especially country homes—there is to be found such another as Deborah. She enters the family as a girl, perhaps like Deborah as a nurse-maid. She watches the family grow up, and to each of them she gives her care and love. Her own special work comes to an end, but she remains in the home, where she is trusted and loved. She enters with eager interest into the lives and fortunes of the young people now grown to manhood and womanhood. She sees them marry, and sheds tears both of gladness and regret at the weddings. The years pass on. She can do no more work now, but she never leaves the home of her devotion and service. At last she dies, and her grave is surrounded by those who honoured and loved her as a faithful servant and friend.

¶ I sometimes think that the old Nannies of English homes are amongst the most beautiful of God's creatures. Year in and year out they just serve a little child, who one day is likely to forget them. They move from mother to daughter, and nothing seems to matter save that they may help a young life. Of course they get a little cross in their old age, even maybe a little difficult ; but no great poet, so far as I know, has ever made a song to their glory. It is my habit to take my hat off to Sisters of Mercy. I wish we took our hats off to the old Nannies of English homes. There are few who so deserve our love.<sup>1</sup>

¶ Winston Churchill paid a beautiful tribute to his faithful old nurse in his reminiscences. He was a youth of twenty when he heard that she had fallen seriously ill in London and he

<sup>1</sup> H. R. L. Sheppard.

hastened to visit her. 'She knew she was ill,' he says, 'but her only anxiety was for me. There had been a heavy shower of rain, and my jacket was wet. When she felt it with her hands she was greatly alarmed for fear I should catch cold. The jacket had to be taken off and thoroughly dried before she was calm again. . . . She had lived such an innocent and loving life of service to others, and held such a simple faith, that she had no fears at all. She had been my dearest and most intimate friend during the whole of the twenty years I had lived.' Some years later, when he was on service abroad, he came upon Gibbon's reference to his old nurse: 'If there be any, and I trust there are some, who rejoice that I live, to that dear and excellent woman their gratitude is due.' 'I thought of Mrs Everest,' Churchill writes, 'and it shall be her epitaph.'

We are told that Deborah and her type belong to a vanishing age. The ties that used to bind mistress and servant no longer hold: such servitude would not now be tolerated. We belong to a freer day, and the world of tomorrow will not know Deborah. It may be so, and it may be well that it is so. But whilst we thank God for every breath of freedom and for the passing of any institution that no longer ministers to human welfare, let us take care that we have something to put in the place of the old loyalties. Deborah may be old-fashioned, but she stood for things that the world can never afford to do without—faithfulness, devotion, disinterested service, love that is stronger than death.

2. Deborah reminds us that humble and obscure lives are of infinite worth. However commonplace our careers, God sees a beauty and purpose in them. This is a day of sore discouragements in the great world, and the trouble is that each of us personally can do so little to help. The evils are on such a gigantic scale that it seems madness to imagine that we can influence things one way or the other. These problems seem beyond the control of the wisest statesmen, the ablest economists, the most notable thinkers; what, therefore, can the ordinary mortal do?

Is there not room for a renewed preaching of the gospel of individual worth? Deborah was but a humble servant—really a slave—in the household of Rebekah and Isaac, but she doubt-

less had her part in the moulding of that family, and, through them, of the Chosen People of God. Deborah, the prophetess of Israel, rendered more conspicuous, but perhaps not more influential, service than Deborah the nurse. She was in touch with young lives and with a nation in its childhood. She watched over the national tree when it was still a tender plant, and trained the stem whilst it could still be bent. So God puts each one of us in a place of influence. It may be as humble as Deborah's, and its opportunity of service may be just as great.

3. Deborah also teaches us that we may shine in the light that streams from another's lamp. Most of us would like to possess native genius and make a show in the world with our gifts and graces. But, Deborah-like, we may find our vocation in helping stronger and more able people to do their work.

¶ Gladstone could never have accomplished what he did if he had not had the care and guardianship, the love and foresight of his wife. In countless ways Catherine Gladstone made it possible for him to do his work. She looked after his health, economized his time, helped to lay his plans, kept off useless interruptions, and generally made the crooked places straight and the rough places plain.

Deborah died at Bethel, and where better could she die than in the place where Jacob's ladder was? As a young man he saw the angels ascending and descending on it. Shortly after Deborah's death, Jacob had another vision at Bethel, and if his eyes still retained their spiritual power he would see among the ascending angels the faithful soul of Deborah.

## Unexpected Finds

Gen. xxxvi. 24.—'This is Anah who found the hot springs in the wilderness, as he fed the asses of Zibeon his father' (R.V.).

THIS verse is itself like one of those hot springs which Anah found in the wilderness—an unexpected and pleasant find in an unlikely spot. The very monotony of the long record of dukes and humbler folk seems to enhance the value of Anah and his find. The historian gives us a rather meaningless list of names of men and



women of whom all that could be said was that 'dust they were, and unto dust they returned.' And then, suddenly, he makes one name stand out, redeemed from oblivion because he *did* something, gratefully remembered by after-ages because he made a contribution to the world's weal.

1. It was no mean discovery, this find of Anah's. Such springs still exist near the Dead Sea and near the site of Tiberias, on the Sea of Galilee, where they formed part of that town's attraction and wealth. Wherever they are found such springs are highly prized by the desert nomads for their medicinal qualities. Tiberias with its pride and pomp has long since crumbled away; but the springs are there to this day, bubbling out of the ground so hot that you cannot keep your hand in them. Anah's discovery would make the whole neighbourhood famous, and enrich a large community. Well might they say of him, 'This was that Anah.'

But perhaps the most interesting fact about him was the place and the circumstances of his great discovery. It was 'in the wilderness,' amid the most depressing and unhelpful surroundings. And it was when he was engaged in the not very enviable occupation of feeding the asses of his father. Asses must be fed, and asses get lost and require to be looked for: but in doing so one man made a name for himself, and another found a kingdom and a crown.

The story has perennial interest just because the thing happens to most of us. In the pursuit of quiet, lowly, menial, often uncongenial tasks, it is time and again given to us to make surprising and beneficent discoveries. Large tracts of our common experience are as barren and unpromising as any desert, and too much of life is given up to the feeding of asses. It is not a very far-fetched description of the occupation of many who have sometimes imagined that they were engaged in more pretentious work. And even when that mood passes, and it is possible to smile at the cynicism that took too mean a view of one's self and those on whose behalf we toil, there still remains a graver aspect of the metaphor. For the Bible has an impressive and reiterating way of speaking of the results of sin as *folly*. And we must reap where we have sown in our foolishness and thoughtlessness. It is bad enough, and degrading enough, to have to feed our own asses; but

many a one, like Anah, has had to feed his father's. Many a one has had to reap with aching back and breaking heart the wild sowing of another's hand. What are the peoples of Europe doing to-day but busily feeding other men's asses in a wilderness which they have made? A wild stampede of passion and ambition and lust—and a thousand lives go out into a rainless desert, to spend their days redeeming the fruit of others' folly and sin.

And yet there is sunrise in the desert; and this verse seems to suggest that for the man who will use his eyes and exercise all his powers, there may be granted wonderful discoveries of healing and of renown in and through these very circumstances of tragedy and shame; so that after-ages shall remember him, not so much in his circumstances of weakness and shame, but shall rather say of him, 'This was he who found the hot springs in the wilderness.'

Trouble has been bringing many of us nearer to one another these days, and we have been discovering some of the too-long concealed springs of life, and have been astonished to find how deep and full and warm they are. To be able to talk frankly about the things which keep us patient and hopeful, to talk simply and naturally, as friends do over the fireside, has brought to many reserved people, and many who thought that they had little spiritual equipment, a great enrichment of life. We are getting over, somewhat, our deep-rooted horror of 'giving ourselves away.' We are coming to realise that it is only as we do give a bit of ourselves away that we can do something to soothe the common anguish.

Pour forth and bravely do your part,  
O knights of the unshielded heart!  
Forth and for ever forward!—out  
From prudent turret and redoubt!

Let us give our friends the benefit of our faith. The world is saved by those who find the warm springs in the wilderness, by the disappointed idealists who still go on trying. Where God is, there cannot be failure, though there may seem to be defeat. And the man whose heart is resting in the Lord can watch events like a man who is watching the sunrise.

2. This Anah of ancient times, who has lived through the find which he made, the discovery wherewith he blessed and enriched the lives of

others, is no exceptional character. The greatest title to fame which any can achieve is through the springs which he lays bare in his own life and in the lives of others. Anah did not dig the well. It was not a fountain which he erected. The hot springs were there all the time; and all that Anah did was to unseal them, and make their healing efficacy widely known.

Is it not just in the discovery and revelation of powers which lay hidden all the time that men have blessed their fellows, and caused their name to be remembered with gratitude throughout the generations? Another than Anah might have driven his asses roughshod through those hidden springs of healing. Another yokel would have run his heedless plough through the mountain daisy that lay in his way; but the Ayrshire ploughman who found it paused to wonder and admire, and he has made a heedless and unobservant world pause and uncover with him. There was one of whom it was said that he did no mighty work; but all things that he spake of Jesus were true, and many believed on Him there. Was that no mighty work?

¶ In the centre of the city of Glasgow, in one of the old churchyards now closed, there is one humble grave containing the body of a factory girl, humbly educated, for many years weak in health and who lived alone in a single room. In one of the mission churches she taught a class of rough, unruly boys; faithfully, tenderly, year after year she told them the simple story of the Cross, and one by one through her influence these lads were led to give their hearts to Christ. That was all her work. She rests to-day amidst the throb and roar of the city which scarcely knew her, and on her tombstone these simple words tell the story of her life: 'She did no miracle, but all things she said of Jesus were true, and many believed on Him there.'<sup>1</sup>

'This is Anah who found the hot springs in the wilderness.' There is a suggestion of the

<sup>1</sup> D. S. Mackay.

incidental about his great discovery, and perhaps the writer intentionally has it so. For it is God's way to give to His beloved 'in sleep,' as it were. The greatest blessings of our life we did not go out deliberately to search for: they slipped in almost unperceived. And when God gave the world His unspeakable Gift He sent Him at the midnight hour, and caused those who *were* awake to the angelic announcement to find Him in the most unlikely of places.

After all has been said about us that can be said, we shall be deemed worthy of remembrance, as we have ourselves been blest, just by the things we find in life and help others to find. There is no outlook too barren, no occupation too dull, to prevent a man from stumbling upon the richest of treasures in the wilderness. Have we found the treasure hid in the field? Have we found the Babe in the manger? Saul went out to look for asses and found a kingdom, found his vocation, found his soul. The King of glory entered not the city of Jerusalem only, He has ridden right into the heart of the world seated upon that lowly ass. The thing that seemed undignified and small and mean, the occupation that seemed degrading, the occasion that looked unpromising, the place that appeared so forbidding, have led to the greatest of discoveries and have produced the most signal triumphs.

The translators of the Hebrew Scripture have been exercised as to what precisely it was that Anah found, though the balance of probability is in favour of the rendering of the Revised Version. But the Hebrew word occurs here only, and the exact rendering is uncertain. Yet the thing that is clear is that this man found something in the wilderness which enriched his own life and blessed the lives of others, and found it under unpromising conditions. We may not be able to put a name to our discovery; but if so be that it has gladdened our own life and overflowed into the lives of others, we shall not be far wrong in calling it God.



## JOSEPH STUDIES

## I

## Joseph the Dreamer

Gen. xxxvii. 19.—‘And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh.’

THE life of Joseph is unquestionably one of the most thrilling chapters in the annals of Israel. Even to-day its dramatic possibilities have been exploited both by the B.B.C. and the Stage. Of the historicity of the story there need be little doubt for it offers no insoluble problems. It is not even improbable. Our Victorian forefathers with their sense of basic solidity might have found the rapid rise of Joseph a strain upon their credulity, but to-day we are witnessing social upheavals which make the story of Joseph relatively tame. Nor is there need to ask whether Joseph actually lived. The account of the removal of his bones (or mummy) when the Israelites left Egypt and their burial at Shechem is at least circumstantial evidence, while the accuracy of the Egyptian local colour and the use of many Egyptian words and phrases in the story of his life afford further grounds for accepting Joseph as an historic figure.

1. Joseph and his brethren were the children of different parents. Jacob was a polygamist and his children were by different mothers, who, though living under the same roof, and thus compelled to maintain a semblance of harmony, must often have come into collision through over-anxiety to promote the interests of their own offspring. We cannot suppose that Jacob's family, any more than those of Abraham and Isaac, were exempt from the evils which polygamy is calculated to produce, not the least of which is morbid jealousy of each other, a passion which, when unrestrained, may lead to the foulest crimes. Let it be remembered that in those days there was no law against polygamy, and therefore in that act there was no sin.

Joseph was the favourite of his father and there seems no doubt that at this time he was what we would call a spoiled child. But he was a spoiled child with many fine qualities and great capabilities. The jealousy of Joseph's brethren is therefore understandable but not

excusable. The fact is he was of finer clay than they. He lived in his mind, and his conflicts and struggles were intellectual and spiritual rather than physical. The elder sons of Jacob were cruel and it has been suggested that the phrase ‘Joseph brought unto his father their evil report’ meant that their terrorism in Shechem had awakened in him a passionate longing for justice and that his antagonism towards them was merely the expression of his revolt against all brutality. We see similar mental processes to-day.

The coat of many colours was a further expression of this divergence in character. The true translation is a ‘tunic of palms and soles,’ that is, a coat reaching to the hands and feet in contrast to the ordinary working tunic which had no sleeves and reached only to the knees. These long white linen coats, which hung down to the ankles, and had long sleeves, were embroidered with a strip of colour round the skirt and the sleeves. These garments were worn only by men who did not work with their hands. Rulers and princes and members of the governing class wore these ‘long coats.’

There is a further touch of local colour in the story of Joseph's dreams. Belief in dreams and their portent has always been particularly strong in the East, and Bedawin Arabs will shape the whole course of a day's duties by the directions indicated in a dream. They will also recount it in all its details without the slightest regard for the effect it may have upon the listeners; the latter may occupy a position of inferiority in the narrative to which it is distinctly unpleasant for them to listen, but a dream is a dream, and no feeling will alter it, or change the course of events flowing from it. Thus the recital of Joseph's dreams (Gen. xxxvii. 6) places him in an unfavourable light, but it is true to Oriental nature. Had the dream been in his disfavour, he would still have recounted it without hesitation. Moreover, a dream may be a warning, and to be forewarned is to be forearmed, so that all who hear through a dream of the part they are going to take may have a chance of escape. In fact, misfortunes are traced back by the Arabs to some night vision, in the belief that the indications it contained had been neglected.

2. Joseph was a dreamer. No one can read the Old Testament even carelessly and not see what emphasis is placed there upon those whom to-day we call visionaries. These men are shown to be of the salt of the earth. These are they who, having ideals, always attain something, however much they stumble and fall in their progress. How often we hear critics say of the Old Testament heroes that they were no better than anyone else. Noah got drunk and in that condition behaved in the most shocking and revolting way; Abraham sacrificed his sister to save his own skin; Jacob tricked his brother Esau in the most shameful manner; Moses lost his temper badly on more than one occasion, and David committed official murder to secure another man's wife for himself. But all these men made good because deep down in their nature there was an ideal and they never lost that ideal. As the writer of Hebrews says—  
‘these men conquered by faith.’

‘Your young men,’ says Joel, ‘shall see visions.’ Youth is the period of visions. In the clear light of life's early days we see with piercing distinctness, because the faculty of the vision is fresh in us. For youth, to see is to act; to believe is to affirm; to know is to do. The measure of a man is the measure of his vision. Man is pre-eminently the creature who sees. Other creatures can look in stolid silence on the stars, but no other can watch them with intelligent curiosity and read their secret.

It is by these visions that men live. To keep these visions through youth and manhood is to live nobly, and for such as do this the visions of youth become the dreams of old age, and life rounds itself off into noble music and Divine completion.

The fool laughs at the visions he cannot understand, crying with the bitter mockery of Joseph's brothers, ‘Behold, this dreamer cometh.’ He forgets the wise words of Robert Louis Stevenson, that ‘it is better to travel hopefully than to arrive’; forgets too, that the ideal of one age is the assured fact of its successor.

We greatly err when we speak of dreams as the vaguest things we know. People think they have settled the whole matter when they say of any project: ‘A very good thing, but an ideal. Those who believe in it are very good men, but they are idealists.’ But the world owes most of what is good to men who have dreamed and

then set themselves to the task of realizing their dreams.

Dreams are they, but they are God's dreams,  
Shall we decry them and scorn them?  
That men shall love one another,  
That white shall call black man brother,  
That greed shall pass from the market-place,  
That men shall meet with God face to face.  
Dreams are they all

But shall we despise them—  
God's dreams!

Dreams are they—to become man's dreams!  
Can we say nay as they claim us?  
That men shall cease from their hating,  
That war shall soon be abating,  
That the pride of dominion and power shall fail,  
That the love of humanity shall prevail.

But shall we despise them—  
God's dreams!

## II

### Joseph in Prison

Gen. xxxix. 20.—‘And Joseph's master took him, and put him into prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison.’

1. WHEN Joseph was carried captive into Egypt he must have felt sure that he would never again see his home. His life as a free human being was over; the future held only slavery and despair.

He had been sold for twenty pieces of silver which was the value set on young fellows at his age in the Mosaic Law, but no doubt the sum paid for him by Potiphar far exceeded this. For, while the Egyptians willingly bought black slaves, because ladies of rank were pleased to have for their attendants negro boys whom they dressed in a fanciful manner—the Court probably indulging in a similar taste—Syrian slaves of fair skin were more keenly sought after. Joseph was of fair complexion, and Dr. Ebers notes in this connexion that on the monuments the men and women of rank are represented as fairer of complexion than the ordinary man, and also that the word *Ami*, the fair-complexioned, stands distinctly for ‘belonging to a higher class.’ So that Joseph would not be regarded as an ignoble captive but as



high and well-born, and the treatment he received, therefore, would be different from that which was meted out to the ordinary slave.

That Joseph possessed outstanding abilities is obvious. That he also possessed outstanding virtues is equally obvious. But one attribute stood out as the secret of his success in whatever position he found himself: *he was reliable*. Where that virtue is lacking all others ultimately fail.

'The Lord was with Joseph,' we are told. But that was because Joseph was loyal to his God. So Tennyson wrote :

Follow the Christ, the King,  
Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the  
King—  
Else, wherefore born ?

What matter that his loyalty landed Joseph in prison ! He had discharged his duties in the household of Potiphar with fidelity. That was all that mattered. Apparently Joseph made no complaint of his unjust treatment. We do not know the reason for his silence, whether it arose from chivalry, or from wisdom, or from philosophy. He went calmly to prison exhibiting self-control, and then, adapting himself to this new and unexpected environment, finds himself again given a position of responsibility.

2. The episode of the dreams of Pharaoh's butler and baker, who were in prison together, introduces a new dramatic touch in this vivid narrative. The chief butler had told his dream and Joseph reassures him that within three days he will be restored to his place, and so the baker, full of eager hope, since the interpretation was so favourable, makes haste to tell his dream. We can see his tragic disappointment when Joseph solemnly declares, 'Within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head from off thee and shall hang thee on a tree.' The incident recalls our Lord's words : 'Two women shall be grinding at the mill : one shall be taken, the other left' ; 'Two men shall be working in the field ; one shall be taken, the other left.' It is a reminder of the uncertainty of life.

The more fortunate butler went back to his job where in the bustle and excitement of his re-appointment he forgot his promise to Joseph. There is a proverb which says that 'Creditors have better memories than debtors,' suggesting

that if we really want to remember we can. And, though the butler atoned for his fault by subsequent confession, we all of us feel that he treated Joseph badly.

'Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.' That comes as a shock to us. We find ourselves behaving like the butler. Why are we so ready to forget the benefits of God ? It is because we are so accustomed to them that our hearts are hardened. Some one has said that if all the stars in heaven were to cease shining for a hundred years, and then were suddenly to flash out again, there would not be an eye in all the earth but would be raised heavenward, not a heart in all the world but would break forth in hymns of praise to God. So with God's benefits. Did they come rarely, singly, unexpectedly, how we should prize them. But they have been over us like the heavens, round us like the air, under us like the earth, ever since we were born.

To the angels in heaven it must seem incredible that any of His children here below should have forgotten the benefits of God. Yet of forgetting them we are all guilty. Let any one look back on the past year and he will find that the things which rise up prominently are not the ceaseless mercies God has shown to him, mercies which have come with the regularity and gentleness of the morning light, 'blessing unasked, unsought' that have entered his door ; but the disappointments, the sufferings, the injuries, it may be, he has endured.

One week's illness is far fresher in our memory than fifty-two weeks of unbroken health. We do not 'write our injuries in the sand, and our kindnesses on the marble' ; we write our mercies on the sand, and to-morrow's tide obliterates the record, whilst too often we grave our misfortunes, as with a pen of iron, on the rock.

Let us forget the things that vexed and tried us,  
The worrying things that caused our souls to  
fret ;

The hopes that cherished long, were still denied  
us,

Let us forget.

Let us forget the little slights that pained us,  
The greater wrongs that rankle sometimes yet ;  
The pride with which some lofty one disdained  
us,

Let us forget.

But blessings manifold, past all deserving,  
Kind words and helpful deeds, a countless  
throng,  
The fault o'ercome, the rectitude unswerving,  
Let us remember long.

### III

## Joseph in Power

Gen. xli. 41.—'And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt.'

1. Two years pass. Now it is Pharaoh who dreams. These dreams of the king include some of the most important elements of Egyptian mythology. The ancient Egyptian worshipped the River Nile. In its rise it was called 'Osiris'—the Fructifier of the Land—and was typified by the male ox; while in its overflow it bore the name of his wife and sister, 'Isis'—the Fruitful Mother—or of 'Hathor'—the Goddess of Fruitfulness—both of whom were worshipped under the symbol of the cow. When, therefore, the kine rose out of the Nile (Gen. xli. 2) it was natural to recognize in them the symbol of Isis-Hathor, that is, of the fertility of the land.

One would have supposed that the wise men of Egypt and the magicians who were summoned by Pharaoh from all over the country the morning after he had had these dreams, would not have found it difficult to discover the meaning of their ruler's dreams; and we are compelled to think they were not very clever, as they stood awkwardly before their impatient and anxious monarch, wondering no doubt if they were going to have their heads chopped off. Then the chief butler remembered Joseph, and Joseph was sent for.

We are told that before he came unto Pharaoh he shaved himself. That did not mean just his beard but his head, for the Egyptians shaved their heads and wore wigs.

Then Joseph interprets the king's dreams. 'Both,' he said, 'were part of the same prophecy for the future.' 'The seven cows,' he said, 'represented seven years.' 'Behold,' he said, 'there will be seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt: and there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and the famine shall consume the land; for it shall be very grievous.'

We can imagine a shocked silence following Joseph's prophecy. The king and his courtiers would be united by their common fear of the coming famine. Every Egyptian knew that if the river rose too high during the rainy season, the autumn crops would be seriously damaged and destroyed. If, on the other hand, there was a drought, and the river was too low to fill the artificial canals and basins constructed as reservoirs, the fields could not be properly watered and the crops would perish.

Then Joseph advised Pharaoh to organize Egypt into various districts which were to be administered by local food controllers. In other words, the country was to be rationed. Pharaoh was greatly impressed. Rising from his throne he asked Joseph to come nearer to him so that they stood close together. Then the king assured him that he was the wisest and most discreet and efficient man in Egypt. Without retiring to his own apartments to consider the matter, Pharaoh, always an impulsive man, appointed Joseph as his Prime Minister and the future organizer of the country's food supply.

A few hours before Joseph had been in prison; his prospects for the future exceedingly vague and uncertain. Suddenly he found himself the most powerful man in Egypt apart from Pharaoh. He bent his head respectfully when Pharaoh took his golden chain from round his neck and placed it round his.

2. The famine, forecast by the prescience of Joseph, duly occurred and concurrently a famine in Canaan which brought Joseph's brethren to Egypt that they might perchance buy the needed corn. And these men are directed to Joseph. We do not wonder that they did not recognize Joseph. That the boy they had sold years before for twenty pieces of silver should be the Premier of Egypt was so completely past the wildest reaches of their imagination. Joseph, however, recognizes them, but he wishes to test them. He wants to know if they are the same reckless, unfeeling men who sold him into slavery—or do they experience remorse for their cruel act? He increases the mystery of his personality and of his knowledge of them by taking one of the brethren, Simeon, and putting him in prison. Probably Simeon was the one who suggested that Joseph should be murdered at the time when they lowered him into the pit. They must have trembled at the selection. Then, after



they had paid for the quota of corn allotted to them and had left Joseph, they discovered their money still in the sacks. This touched their superstitious fears. 'What is this that God hath done?' they whisper to each other.

They reach home and face their father with the news that if more corn be wanted Benjamin, the youngest son and now the father's favourite, must go back with them. How terrible it must have been to witness the father's grief when they told him that unless Benjamin was surrendered they must all die, as the amount of corn they had gained could not last long. So the old scene of the loss of Joseph was re-acted—how the memory of that crime must have worn them down! Then they return to Egypt, this time with Benjamin, and they find themselves before Joseph. They see the mysterious way in which, as if by supernatural knowledge, Joseph places them according to their ages, and their fears are intensified by discovering Joseph's own cup in Benjamin's sack, a clear proof of theft. With what result?

Under Egyptian law this meant death. It seems to them as though they were helpless in the face of some malignant fate. Had they been jealous of Benjamin as of Joseph? The whole crime was being repeated like a police test in a modern novel. They confer fearfully but this time they decide that they must stand together. They will not desert Benjamin. If he is doomed, as he would be by the cruel laws of those days, they will perish with him. Judah pleads in the sublimest plea in all literature—without Benjamin he will not return home. The life of his father is bound up with the life of the lad; only let the lad return with his brethren and he will remain, a bondman in his stead.

This appeal was enough for Joseph. The brethren who could thus speak and act were not the same men as those who sat down in Dothan to eat bread, while he, their brother, lay forsaken in the pit. Joseph cannot restrain himself any longer. He orders the servants and officials to leave, and in the intimacy of their home relationship he declares himself. It is impossible for us to conceive the effect of this revelation. For the moment they must have been utterly

staggered, confounded, amazed. Remembering their cruelty to him, the dastardly wrong he had suffered at their hands; and seeing before them the governor of a mighty nation, binding its princes at his pleasure, and teaching its senators wisdom, we can well understand how terror and remorse would so paralyse their heart as to leave them speechless in misery.

They could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. 'And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.'

Joseph has been called the Prototype of Christ because of his exercise of forgiveness.

In the course of the 1914-18 war a young woman and her brother were pursued down a street by a Turkish soldier, cornered in an angle of a wall, and the brother slain before his sister's eyes. She dodged down an alley, leaped a wall, and escaped. Later, being a nurse, she was forced by the Turkish authorities to work in the military hospital. Into her ward was brought one day the same Turkish soldier who had slain her brother. He was very ill and slight inattention would assure his death.

The young woman, now safe in America, confesses to the bitter struggle that took place in her mind. The old Adam cried, 'Vengeance'; the new Christ cried, 'Love.' But equally for the man's good and for her own, the better side conquered, and she nursed him as carefully as any other patient in the ward.

The recognition had been mutual, and one day, unable longer to restrain his curiosity, the Turk asked his nurse why she had not let him die, and when she replied, 'I am a follower of Him who said, "*Love your enemies and do them good*,"' he was silent for a long time. At last he spoke: 'I never knew that there was such a religion. If that is your religion tell me more about it, for I want it.'

CHARLES W. BUDDEN.

## The Making of Manhood

Gen. xxxvii. 19.—‘And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh.’

Gen. xxxix. 20, 21.—‘And Joseph’s master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king’s prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison. But the Lord was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.’

BENVENUTO CELLINI, in his book concerning his work as an artist in the Renaissance, describes rather carefully in one place how he made the famous statue of Perseus, the Greek hero. He describes how he gathered his material, which was to be heated until sufficiently molten to run into the mould; he describes the metals he used, and how at the end he had to use common pewter, so that there should be an abundant supply. He describes how the furnace had to be kept at full heat so that the metal should be properly molten. And then he gives his result after the gathering of the materials and the use of the fire. A similar testimony is presented to us in this short story of Joseph, one of the great short stories of the world. People are at present, especially in Germany, to some extent deriding the Old Testament, and wanting to turn it out of the Scriptures. The way in which to read the Old Testament is to read it as the record of a progressive revelation of God.

Let us take this great short story, and see how in its vividness and simplicity the teaching of God leaps to life, and is a very present help for the present day.

1. Consider, first of all, the raw material out of which a true man was to be made. Throughout we shall keep in mind that perfect model of mankind, of human nature, that we find in our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Joseph was obviously an attractive youth, and he was a favoured and a favourite son, the son of Jacob’s older age, and the son of his best-loved wife; and Jacob made the great mistake, that is sometimes made in a large family, of showing his favouritism; and that wonderful coat was given to Joseph. It made him walk amongst his brethren like a young prince. Not a very hopeful beginning. And then Joseph himself was certainly indiscreet, for when he had those two remarkable dreams, he blurted out the suggestion that he was to be the head

of the family amongst his brethren, and ultimately the head of the family over his father and mother. It was no wonder that traces of conceit and complacency were found in this inconsidered statement of what he had dreamed, and his father rebuked him. Again, not a very satisfactory beginning.

But Joseph had two things that give us hope. He was a dreamer. Of course, there are dreams and dreams. There are the dreams that come of laziness and idleness and selfishness and gross feeling; and there are dreams that come of mere sentimentalism, in which one plays a pretty part in picturesque surroundings. But there is not much to be gained from that. There are dreams that come from the deeper thoughts, ‘the vapour that comes from the cooling of the machinery of the mind,’ dreams through which, maybe, God could speak when He chose, and can speak still, perhaps, when He chooses. And Joseph was a dreamer because he had believed in what his father told him concerning God’s ways with the family; that God had a plan for the family; that there was a destiny for it, and that the family ought to live according to the destiny. And so Joseph—just a youth—had come to believe in a living God, a living God who could help him. Call him a prig, if you like. When a young man or woman takes a great view of life, thinks seriously about the possibilities of life, takes himself or herself seriously, there is a real temptation to advertise the fact, and such an one is apt to be called a prig. Better a youth with a touch of priggishness than one who is largely a kind of fool, who is selfish, and who carefully conceals his or her determination and plans to get something good at all costs for themselves. Well, that is the raw material of Joseph; not specially hopeful, but with bright gleams in it.

¶ Like every youth of capacity, Joseph came to have his day-dreams. These day-dreams though often awkward and even offensive in their expression, are not always the mere discontented cravings of youthful vanity, but are frequently instinctive gropings towards the position which the nature is fitted to fill. ‘Our wishes,’ it has been said, ‘are the fore-feeling of our capabilities’; and certainly where there is any special gift or genius in a man, the wish of his youth is predictive of the attainment of manhood.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Marcus Dods.



2. We pass to the furnace, and we find that Joseph is going to have a threefold temptation. He is going to be tempted by hardship; he is going to overcome the temptation of an unlawful pleasure; and he is going to face the temptation of disappointment.

(1) Think of that first morning when he wakes up in Potiphar's household. Sleep gone. It is dawn. What does he feel? A slave, who used to be free. It is a strange land with its plains, and the sand beyond the plains, and the great river. No green-covered hills. And a strange language, a strange people, a strange household. And he a slave; a maddening thought. And all through his brothers' treachery; a devastating thought. His saintly old father thinking him dead; and that little brother of his, that he may never see again. The thought was enough to crush him. But obviously, Joseph was not going to be crushed. He learned to keep back his tears. He addressed himself to learning the language, to educating himself, which he would not have had an opportunity of doing in his own rural surroundings among the flocks. He learned to be pitiful and reliable. Very soon we see him beginning to climb, to climb nobly, to be trusted, to be found capable, and to be trusted yet more. Potiphar was a busy man, a captain of the guard; he had a prison under his care; and he was often with the Egyptian ruler, and he rejoiced to have in Joseph a trustworthy person who was able to deal with things that were delegated to him. So we see Joseph mount, in spite of that tremendous hardship into which he came. How was it managed? He had a window to the sky. He looked past the Egyptian landscape. He had a secret chamber in his soul where he met God, the true God. Otherwise he would have been a broken man at that beginning.

¶ Amiel declares that 'to hope for justice in this world is a sign of sickly sensibility. We must learn to do without it.' There are some whose wrongs so embitter them that they never smile again. There are others whose wrongs so madden them that their hands are raised to heaven in fierce upbraiding. But there is a nobler way. To endure undeserved suffering and persecution and let no murmur escape the lips and no bitterness enter the soul—that is true greatness, that is Christlikeness.

(2) Temptation number one passed, the furnace is heated afresh. Temptation number two assails him, the temptation of unlawful

pleasure. Here is Joseph, undoubtedly attractive. The store-rooms are not far from the private apartments, and very soon he is tempted to do a dastardly deed to his master, tempted by the advances of his master's wife. We hold our breath a little. An ugly thing, and rather a hideous thing, for this young man, so fully trusted, to be betrayed by a woman older than himself. Joseph might have said: My master has no business to keep me in slavery. I have served him well; I should have been given my freedom. Would it not, through this mistress's interest, be a short cut into freedom? It is possible, perhaps, to make a case for Joseph; but Joseph says: No, 'how can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?' Religious conviction comes in the moral struggle. The young man on whose head has rested the soft benediction of the God of Heaven is not easy game for the devil.

¶ In *John Inglesant* the hero is exposed, like Joseph, to a fierce temptation, and comes through it triumphantly. 'The devil's plot,' says the writer, 'had failed. It is not easy to ruin him with whom the pressure of Christ's hand yet lingers in the palm.'

This I hold firm :  
Virtue may be assailed, but never hurt,  
Surprised by unjust force, but not enthralled.<sup>1</sup>

(3) And then there comes temptation number three, the temptation of disappointment. Joseph is in prison. Let us look at him there. He is beginning to be of use. He remembers all that the jailer mentions in his hearing that he has to remember. He begins to climb; he is very soon sub-jailer, and then assistant-jailer. We must remember that prison arrangements in the East in the old days, and still, to some extent, to-day, were very different from our prison arrangements. When the two officials from Pharaoh's court came in, Joseph was to attend to them. After his hardships and his struggles for moral purity, we find that he is still sympathetic. He is not brutalized by his experiences. He has not become selfish by his treatment. He is interested in the prisoners he serves. That is one thing to Joseph's honour. More than that, he has the privilege, with the help of God, of interpreting their dreams. The first one is a cheerful interpretation, and the

<sup>1</sup> Milton, *Comus*.

butler's face is wreathed in smiles. The other interpretation is not a cheerful one, and there must have been a great temptation to make things smooth for the baker. But, no, Joseph is straight, as well as being sympathetic. A third thing about Joseph is that he has not got broken-spirited. So day after day there was the same old round, never a gleam in the darkness ; and at last he sees a chance. The butler is going to be released ; he has done the butler a kindness. 'Remember me,' he says. 'I have done nothing wrong. I was sold into Egypt as a slave. I do not deserve to be in prison. Mention my name.' Do you see his budding hope ? How easily men and women let their spirits be broken ! They pass through hard times, they have to face refusal after refusal, difficulty after difficulty, and at last they say, It is no use trying. This is the last effort. And that often ensures success, when there is a determination of taking the first chance to make the last effort. But Joseph was disappointed, for we read : 'Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph but forgot him.'

3. That is the furnace that burned around the life of Joseph. There was the temptation of hardship ; there was the temptation of unlawful pleasure ; and there was the temptation of disappointment. What was the result ? At last the fire is over ; the mould has been filled. What kind of a man is this Joseph ? Extraordinarily able ; able in big things. He is able so to arrange things during the seven years of plenty that when the seven years of famine come the population of Egypt are in no want. We may ask : Was it fair play ? Remember the Old Testament is a book of progressive revelation. It does not say that Joseph was an example of a supremely perfect statesman. What he did was quite above board, and it saved the people from starvation. If he had not planned like that Egypt would have been littered with corpses. It is the capable person at work.

We find that Joseph is also a most sympathetic and forgiving person. Read those moving stories when his brethren began to come along. Joseph watches them, still in disguise ; still unknown to them he tests them, and once nearly breaks down. Recall that second visit when he said : 'Tell me, is the old man still alive, whom you call your father ?' Tell me

about your youngest brother. Is this he ? Is he safe ? Have you brought him ?' And then we are told he had to retire to a place to weep. And at another time his emotion is so great that the whole of the household hear him weeping.

Again, there is the great fact that Joseph kept his religion. And after he has finished his long fight, what is his last message ? 'When you go back to the land of my fathers, take my bones with you.' He believes in the promises of God, and he believes right to the end. Joseph deserves a place in the gallery of the Bible of those eminent for character and for faith. The fire was hot, but the result was glorious.

¶ Joseph, whose public life began at thirty, might have stood for his portrait to Tennyson when he depicted an ideal statesman :

Dost thou look back on what hath been,  
As some divinely gifted man,  
Whose life in low estate began  
And on a simple village green ;

Who makes by force his merit known,  
And lives to clutch the golden keys,  
To mould a mighty state's decrees,  
And shape the whisper of the throne ;

And moving up from high to higher,  
Becomes on Fortune's crowning slope  
The pillar of a people's hope,  
The centre of a world's desire.

## Clothes and the Man

Gen. xxxvii. 33.—'It is my son's coat ; an evil beast hath devoured him.'

It was a natural inference ; yet it was entirely unjustified and utterly false. This same inference is made about many and different things, and because of the needless miseries it adds to life, it shall be our theme. It is the inference that life is destroyed and ended because the garment it wore is discovered to be spoiled and empty.

The brethren of Joseph, having sold their brother, deceived their father. They brought the coat of Joseph—that coat which had caused so many mischiefs, and which has passed into a symbol and a proverb for favouritism. They



brought it now all dabbled with blood, and they said, 'This we have found.' More than this they needed not to say.

'Without doubt,' said Jacob in his emotion. The finality of it sounds odd and ironical because we happen to know how wrong he was. What is it in human nature which makes a mistake of this kind so frequent? The raiment is stripped and torn and soiled; therefore the life is finished. The coat is stained and empty; therefore the son is dead. There was no 'therefore' about it. The facts were entirely opposite. That torn coat, so far from signifying the end of Joseph, was actually the sign of his emancipation. Chance had made him the favourite son of an old and unwise man. His gaudy coat was the emblem of what people call luck. Rid of it he is going on to depend not on luck but on grit, not on favouritism but on character.

Yet this is a real and moving sorrow of Jacob for him. 'An evil beast hath devoured him,' and no man may touch so real a sorrow save tenderly. Yet there comes down through the ages, and out of every generation, the sound of this same mourning. It is a mourning which need not have been. A sentiment has been wounded to death, and men who cherished it have wept as if a cause had been destroyed. A dogma is roughly handled and left discarded, and good men who have been reared with it have spoken as if truth had been devoured by an evil beast.

We may reflect upon certain illustrations of this inveterate tendency which lays these needless burdens upon men.

1. The first is gravest of all. It is that which our Lord corrected when He once said: 'Fear not them which can kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul.' Soul and body are familiarly together on human lips, and one of the most enduring of the problems of thought has been to determine the relation between the two. Has man a soul? was the query of a placard in the street, and Dr Parker, seeing it, thundered that day his answer: 'No! He *has* a body; he *is* a soul.' It is the affirmation that these bodies of ours are the creation of spirit—more possibly still that they are the focal centres upon which a wonderful system of spiritual forces clusters and converges, in order that, by waking up to know itself in that centre, as separate from the Mind of the universe, the

Over-Soul, as Emerson called it, and by undergoing a human experience, it might shape itself at length into an immortal personality.

This is the first great religious thought of the body. 'This tabernacle,' the Apostle named it. It has its dignity and its rights, and every function of it has its holy service to fulfil in the economy of human life. But it is housing.

¶ Dr Thomas Yates was held up late one night in a certain city, and betook himself to a friend's house where he knew was a welcome. His friend was no believer in any Christian sense, but a rationalist, given, on the only religious side he seemed to have, to pantheistic leanings and speculations. Dr Yates found him that night alone, and strangely rapt and silent. He said to him: 'An hour ago a man, a friend of mine near by, a noble friend, died while I held him in my arms. But in that moment I knew it was not his end: I felt that he had slipped silently out of my grasp behind the curtain.' After a pause he said: 'I cannot tell why. But for the first time I am certain of the soul and of immortality. I do not think I shall ever doubt these again.'

¶ When he was dying the Islamic saint and mystic, Ahmed Al Ghazali, wrote these verses:

Tell thou to my friends, when weeping,  
 They my words decry,  
 Here you find my body sleeping,  
 But it is not I.

Now in life immortal hovering,  
 Far away I roam;  
 This was my house, my covering,  
 'Tis no more my home.

This was as the cage to bound me;  
 I, the bird, have flown;  
 This was but the shell around me;  
 I, the pearl, am gone.

Over me as o'er a treasure,  
 Had a spell been cast;  
 God hath spoken at His pleasure,  
 I am free at last.

2. There are lesser concerns about which we fall into the mischiefs of a false inference:

(1) There is the *Christian Church*. There are deeply religious people whose ideas have been so shaken up that they think the Church is being

shaken down. Yet in truth what is happening is what has happened again and again. Old tight garments which held it, and with which men clothed the indestructible idea of the Christian Church, are being shed. The thing itself, the fellowship of redeemed believers, the Church as the instrument of the Kingdom of God among them—this is greater than any clothes it has worn or wears.

It is not of this that misgiving is justified. That which may well disturb the Christian mind is this old Jacob mistake which takes the garment for the life. It has sometimes emerged in discussions concerning Christian unity. These things have been spoken of as if they were simply schemes for reinforcement and increased collective effectiveness, not a union which is a meeting of brothers in which there is willing sacrifice for love's sake and deep kinship, but more like unto the amalgamation of rival firms who know themselves too weak to continue rivals; an accommodation with a view to popularity. This is a jarring thing. It is too like Jacob's concern over Joseph's coat. The coat is nothing; it is the living Church which is everything.

(2) There is the *Bible*, and some hasty and sorrow-provoking inferences about what is happening to it. Devout people have cherished a theory about it—about its origin, its nature, its inspiration. They are being left with a torn coat. Their alarm and sorrow are no matter for scoff. Their dismay will be deep and real until they will permit themselves to be taught that the real question is not how we think God should have spoken to man, but how He has spoken; not what we think the Bible must be, but what it is.

What is gone or going is an old dress which cramped the Scriptures, and hid their wonder and miracle. Joseph in his coat was a family fetish, adored by some, but an exasperation to others. Without his needless coat it began speedily to be seen how great he was in himself.

(3) Then there is *religion* itself, and some too hasty inferences about it. The clothes are for ever being confused with the essential and living thing. The torn coat of a traditional theology is flung down, and it is said, 'Behold, religion is finished.' Man is made for truth, but the truth he sees and grasps is always human truth, the reflection of the eternal in the temporary. What may be true as a stage may be false as a finality. Religion does not perish with its garment.

¶ In our era of the World, those same Church-Clothes have gone sorrowfully out-at-elbows: nay, far worse, many of them have become mere hollow Shapes, or Masks, under which no living Figure or Spirit any longer dwells; but . . . Religion in unnoticed nooks is weaving for herself new Vestures, wherewith to reappear, and bless us, or our sons or grandsons.<sup>1</sup>

A man's theology can wait until experience beats it out for him. But meanwhile there is the hunger for Something—for Some One, who can complete our lives and answer our dissatisfactions, and deal with our failures and futilities. The heart of us cries for the living God. Shall any raise a foolish voice to say, 'An evil beast hath devoured him'?

Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard,  
that firm remains on high  
The everlasting throne of Him  
who form'd the earth and sky?

Art thou afraid His pow'r shall fail  
when comes thy evil day?  
And can an all-creating arm  
grow weary or decay?

He gives the conquest to the weak,  
supports the fainting heart;  
And courage in the evil hour  
His heav'nly aids impart.

## Believing the Worst

Gen. xxxvii. 33.—'An evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces.'

At the end of the year, the man with a bank account gets all his used cheques returned in a bundle. What an instructive thing it would be if we could get all our fears and apprehensions during the year returned to us in the same fashion, so that we could see how many of them had been honoured, how many of them had come true! Or, to change the figure, suppose that, after a year of life, we could read it like a history in parallel columns, one for fears and one for facts, so that at any moment we could see what we thought or feared about a certain interest, and then, by referring to the other column, could find out what had really been

<sup>1</sup> Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, 149.



happening at that time, what a revelation that would be, and what a lesson for us all!

Of course, we should also find that joys we expected turned out sorrows, that anxieties that haunted us were true prophets of trouble. In a normal experience, however, these are the exceptions, and our duty to God is to treat them so, and not, as we so often do, as the things to be most surely looked for.

¶ On his seventieth birthday Dean Inge told the reporters who came to interview him that one thing life had taught him was that the troubles we had anticipated and worried about never turned out so disastrously as we had feared.

1. In this incident from the life of Jacob we have a striking instance of how God delights to disappoint man's fears. His beloved son Joseph is away on a journey, and a blood-stained coat is brought to the father. The conclusion is swift and bitter. Joseph has fallen a prey to some wild beast! But turn to the parallel column of Scripture, and do we find Joseph's bones bleaching beside some animal's den? No, we find Joseph himself on his way to Egypt, where by and by he reigns as a prince and succours the father who is mourning him as dead.

Jacob's inference on the evidence before him was perfectly natural. Joseph was absent, there was the story of the other sons, and here was the coat all stained with blood. Nevertheless his conclusion was wrong! It was a fear which, from Jacob's point of view, looked as certain as could be, and yet it proved groundless.

What one marvels at, however, in oneself and others, is that 'natural conclusion' should almost always be synonymous with 'worst possible conclusion.' There are people who never board a train but they have a clear vision of the possibility of an accident before they reach the end of their journey, who never see a telegraph boy come in at their gate but they suspect evil news. And we say that is natural. But the point is—Why should not the natural conclusion be the most hopeful one? Why, when we piece together the fragments of the puzzle of what is coming, as the child fits his blocks together to make a picture, why should it be natural to turn the black side uppermost? Some chance word we have had repeated to us by a busybody, which one we deemed our friend

has said behind our back, fills us with bitter thoughts and makes us rail against false friends. But this puzzle block has its white side—the words may be inaccurate, or may be capable of another explanation. There is at least the faithfulness of a lifetime to put into the other scale. But no! we turn the thing black side up and have eyes for no other aspect than that. That may be natural, but it is not Christian.

The man who has accepted the view of God and the world which Jesus has enshrined in His life and teaching, ought to believe that the bright side is the right side. It was not a pagan philosopher, but our Lord Himself who found this faith, proved it, and handed it down to us—'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'

¶ In a book which I read years ago a London doctor was the hero. He was paralysed and bedridden, but almost outrageously cheerful, and his smile so brave and radiant that everyone forgot to be sorry for him. His children adored him, and when one of his boys was leaving home and starting forth upon life's adventure, Dr Greatheart gives him good advice. 'Johnny,' he said, 'the thing to do, my lad, is to hold your own end up, and to do it like a gentleman, and please remember that the biggest troubles you've got to face are those that never come.'<sup>1</sup>

Peace, brother: be not over-exquisite  
To cast the fashion of uncertain evils;  
For, grant they be so, while they rest unknown,  
What need a man forestall his date of grief,  
And run to meet what he would most avoid?  
Or, if they be but false alarms of fear,  
How bitter is such self-delusion!<sup>2</sup>

2. In his life already, Jacob had seen very black clouds break in blessings on his head. He was very lonely and full of fears, for example, when he lay down in Bethel, yet events proved that he had made his bed that night very near to the gates of heaven. It was a black lookout for him when Esau was hastening to meet him with four hundred men, but how happily the gloom broke up in the gladness of reconciliation!

'We are never so near the great calamities,' says Mark Rutherford, 'as we imagine ourselves to be.' Seeing that our fears have been disappointed so often, is it not time for us now to look at life from the other point of view, and instead of cowering from the anticipated blow,

<sup>1</sup> Alistair MacLean.

<sup>2</sup> Milton, *Comus*.

go forth with hopeful heart to welcome the blessing ?

I'll not confer with sorrow  
Till to-morrow.  
But Joy shall have her way  
This very day.

Early in his life, God had made Jacob quite sure that He meant good by him, and only good. He had received a promise, as he believed, that he was under the watchful guardianship of God. We can imagine that, when Jacob found out the truth in the matter of Joseph, he was moved to declare that he might have been more hopeful, that he need not have been so quick to suspect evil. Is it going beyond the bounds of fitness to imagine what God thought ? In spite of all He had done for Jacob, and was planning to do still, was He likely to be pleased that Jacob should be so quick to take sides with appearances against Him ?

We believe, on the testimony of Jesus, in the Fatherhood of God. With some of us it is perhaps the central pillar of our creed. Try, then, to eke out your conception of what that means, as Christ invited us to do, by reading into it your own ideas of Fatherhood. Suppose that your son, to whom you had given abundant proof of your affection, went about fearing constantly that you purposed to do him some hurt, would you not, at least, be disappointed ? And is not that the fashion in which many of us treat God ? You would be much better pleased if your son persisted in believing, in spite of all appearances, that you had something good in store for him, even when it was not what he expected. Does not God desire that we should honour Him with the same confidence ? To suffer an evil that has not yet come, to shoulder a burden that He has not as yet laid upon us—is not that to do a dishonour to the Love of God ?

The conclusion of the matter then was that Jacob was mistaken and Joseph was not dead. Bad as the case seemed, the bright side turned out the right side after all. God was kinder to Jacob than he imagined. He had to change his view, and change it penitently before God. The optimism which Christ would teach us, may sometimes have to change its view too, though not so often as the other. But it does not need

to confess and ask God's forgiveness when it changes. Shall God be angry that we looked for sunshine, and, in His wisdom, He appointed cloud ? Nay indeed, for what we expect from God is our little measure of what He is to us ; and poor and distorted as the mirror may be, the Father will not be displeased that the Face it reflects seems gracious.

## The Power of Principle

Gen. xxxix. 9.—‘ How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God ? ’

IN that far-off period when Joseph lived, moral restraint was much weaker than it is to-day, and the mere pagan joy of life proportionately stronger. Consider what it meant for such a youth to be suddenly introduced to the corrupting and luxurious life of Egypt. From the simple patriarchal life of the plains he was violently separated by a series of bitter vicissitudes. He was a peasant of genius, suddenly made a citizen of a complex civilization ; and such an instance as that of Robert Burns may serve to remind us of the grave perils of the position. If he had ever sighed for a larger life than that of the agriculturist and cattle breeder, now he had it. If he had ever felt athirst for the pleasures of life, now that thirst might be easily gratified. He was among a people who loved pleasure, and who knew little of sin. The standards by which they measured life were wholly different from those to which he had been accustomed. Probably there was not one among his acquaintances who would not have laughed at his scruples, and have jeeringly told him to do in Egypt as Egypt did. The peasant of genius in the house of Potiphar—conceive the situation. How easy to snatch at forbidden pleasures, which not one of his acquaintances would have resisted or would have even thought it politic to resist. But Joseph did resist, and, as the sequel showed, his whole future life and the existence of his people depended on his resistance. His first instinctive words are, ‘ How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God ? ’ And when we come to weigh these words, and measure the whole situation, what we see is this—that the whole secret of Joseph's triumph was that he had principles and that he was faithful to them.



Joseph had a sure grasp on two principles ; that he was accountable to God for his actions, and that certain actions were wicked ; and in the most tremendous hour of moral crisis which he knew he was saved by these principles.

1. We sometimes say of a man, 'He is an unprincipled man'; what is it we mean? We mean that he is unscrupulous. There is hardly a more damning epithet that can be applied to a human creature. Such a man proves himself in every relation of life utterly untrustworthy and unreliable. If he be a business man there is no knavery which he will not practise on occasion ; if you confide your interests to him he will sacrifice them the moment self-interest interferes ; and not because he deliberately means to be a knave or a thief but simply because there is no fundamental honesty about him, which gives a governing principle to conduct. If he be a politician he learns to lie so glibly that he hardly knows when he lies ; he uses any weapon that comes to his hand without a thought of its nature ; and in the long run he does his country more lasting damage than could be wrought by the wildest anarchist. And when we come to the social aspects of life, the wrongs wrought by lack of principle are even more agonizing though perhaps more circumscribed in their effects.

¶ George Eliot has shown us the harm that can be wrought by such a man in her novel *Romola*. She takes pains to show us that Tito Melema was not, in the ordinary sense of the term, a bad man. He has many engaging and quite fascinating qualities. He is brilliant, refined, fond of giving pleasure to others, and eager to make himself friendly and serviceable. But in his heart he has no principle, no love of virtue, no respect for duty. The moment his personal interests are menaced he turns to adamant. To save himself he will sacrifice anyone ; at the root of all his gaiety and fascinating manners, there is an utterly unscrupulous self-interest. He is no libertine, but he will ruthlessly wreck the life of the little blue-eyed contadina who pleases him with her child-like ways. He is not a brute ; yet he will cast off his benefactor—with real regret—the moment his presence becomes inconvenient. And so the man goes through life wrecking the peace of all who know him, and finally is wrecked himself.

Principle, then, means a moral and spiritual standard which is sincerely accepted and rigidly

obeyed. It gives us a power of moral discrimination, and enables us to say, 'This may be a pleasure, but it is also wickedness.' It gives us an awe-struck sense of responsibility to the unseen God, and enables us to say, 'How can I sin against God?' And it becomes clear at once that such a principle working in a man's heart, such a moral standard obediently accepted, must necessarily alter and exalt the whole nature of a man's conduct. The business man knows then that the eye of God is on his ledger, and the workman makes his work good because he would feel himself dishonoured if he did not. The statesman in hours of difficulty reminds himself that certain things are inevitably and eternally right ; that it is better to fail in the right than to succeed in the wrong ; and that while expediency is man's wisdom, righteousness is God's. The ordinary man in all the social tests of life is lifted beyond the reach of temptations which offer momentary pleasures and advantages, because he sees life in a nobler perspective and has learned the inner joy of a virtue that is unstained, and an integrity which is uncorrupted. To such men right and wrong are no sounding phrases, they are the only abiding realities. And so when they are suddenly brought face to face with some great temptation they are able to fall back upon their sense of right, their sense of God, and to say, 'How can I do this wickedness, and sin against God?' And they *cannot* do it because a higher power holds them in its grasp, and a nobler vision gives them instant mastery over the base and the corrupting vision.

2. Now, it is as impossible to acquire sudden virtue as it is to acquire sudden heroism. Behind every human act there lies a history, and the act is the fruit of the history. Grapes do not grow upon thorns, or figs on thistles, said Jesus—by which He meant that character rules conduct. Men do not always remember this. They suppose that if a great temptation came to them they would find some sort of magical power to resist it. But a man never finds in his heart the flower he has not planted there ; he never finds the grape upon the thorn, or the fig upon the thistle. All principle means a slow accretion of will, thought, and conviction, the gradual emergence from the fermenting chaos of a man's nature of the solid and impregnable elements on which he can build and rest ; and in the great

crises of temptation it is only by force of principle that we can be saved.

We see how true this is when we remember that all great temptations are sudden. On that memorable day when Joseph faced the great temptation of his life, he faced it without warning. If he had known what was about to happen he might have braced himself for the hour, and have called up all the resources of his prudence and his will. But life gives very few of us the chance of inventing a deliberate strategy against a coming battle. We are taken unawares; we must fight as we stand. Is it not plain then that to be prepared at all for temptation, we must be always prepared? And how are we to be prepared but by that daily, hourly attitude of mind which makes virtue dear to us and God real? And what does this mean but that it is principle alone that can save us in the sudden shock? If Joseph had had to begin to be religious on that fateful morning, nothing could have saved him; it was because he *was* religious, because he had lived his young life in stainless virtue, that he had resources to fall back on now, and stood fast in the evil day.

3. There is another train of thought suggested by this episode in the life of Joseph. There can be no doubt it was part of the discipline he endured in achieving that final greatness of character which made him one of the most memorable men in human history. The superficial man will probably say, 'Why are such temptations permitted in a world where God is supposed to rule? If God wishes me to be pure, why doesn't He keep me pure?' Simply because you are a man, not a puppet, and because purity cannot truly be said to exist without the conquest of impurity, as light cannot be said to exist without darkness. This is the meaning of temptation; it is discipline. We do not enter the world ready-made; we are engaged in the making of ourselves, and in the process temptation must needs play a tremendous part. To blame temptation, therefore, is merely childish and foolish, for what great life has ever yet been lived that did not grapple with the ghostly adversary, and win its greatness out of wrong resisted, evil overcome?

¶ 'Nothing,' says St Bernard, 'can work me damage, except myself. The harm that I sustain I carry about in me; and never am a real sufferer but by my own fault.'

4. And so the further truth which emerges from this story is that *character is fate*, to quote a well-known aphorism of Novalis. There is nothing fortuitous in such battles as this which Joseph fought; they are determined solely by character. What are we? What equipment do we bring to the struggle? We may not be tempted precisely as Joseph was, but no man passes through life without his terrible hours of testing and temptation. If we dared to speak of the things which we ourselves have known; how many of us could bear witness to these sudden temptations which break on the soul like the black squall upon a summer sea; and how many of us would shudder at the thought of how nearly we made shipwreck of life! What saved us then, and what alone had power to save us? Simply this; the power of principle. It may be that we had absolutely nothing else on which we could rely. Perhaps the great temptation overtook us in a time when the intellectual difficulties of religion had proved too great for us, and all the old theologies in which we had been bred, had melted away. But we had something left—a stubborn conviction that nothing could make wickedness other than wicked, that God remained as the real witness and judge of our life, demanding truth in the inward parts, and we could say as F. W. Robertson said, 'After finding littleness where I expected nobleness, and impurity where I thought there was spotlessness, again and again I despaired of the reality of goodness. But in all that struggle the bewilderment never told upon my conduct. Moral goodness and moral beauty are realities—they are no dream; and they are not mere utilitarian conveniences.' And to say that is a great thing; yet a thing we all may say. It is a weapon which is invincible, a spell before which the most alluring vision of evil melts away.

## Leadership

Gen. xxxix. 22.—'The keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it.'

JOSEPH, as depicted in the beautiful Biblical narrative, was a born leader. His personal appearance for one thing prepossessed everybody in his favour; for he was 'a goodly person and well-favoured.' He had also early learned



in the school of affliction, which only made his heart more tender and considerate of others. He was a man of principle, too, conscientious, trustworthy, and in the long-run character counts for much. But his supreme qualification was that he had an inner life of simple faith.

There was in him in addition the unusual combination of the imaginative and the practical. The young man who dreamed dreams and saw visions was also a man of affairs with remarkable talent for business. The born leader of men must have something of both qualities, the power of the dreamer of appealing to sentiment and creating enthusiasm, and at the same time he must prove his capacity and create confidence in his practical wisdom. Joseph showed he possessed both sets of qualities in all the varied situations in which he was placed. The young slave who rose to be overseer in the house of his master, when he sank to be a prisoner impressed all there with his character and with his capacity, so that the keeper of the prison trusted him, and all the inmates readily assented to his personal superiority, till he took his natural place as leader, so that 'whatsoever the prisoners did there, he was the doer of it.' He was the inspiring force, accomplishing more by his influence over others than was possible by any individual exertion.

1. It is the power to do this which constitutes leadership. No man can do a great work single-handed. He must work with, and through, others. He must have friends and comrades of some sort, or at least instruments; and the highest kind of leadership is that which makes all its instruments into friends, working together for a common end, comrades in a common cause. It is one of the noblest things in human nature that men give such pure devotion to an admired and loved leader, that they are hero-worshippers, though sometimes the hero is very poor clay at the best. In truth the world waits for leaders in every branch of thought and activity, waits for men whom it can follow with a whole heart.

¶ Here is a story—a true one. It comes from Italy, from one of the great periods of Garibaldi. He had conquered Sicily for Italy, he had conquered a large part of the Neapolitan kingdom on the mainland, and was held up on a river. A well-known Englishman drifted into the camp, and while strolling about came upon

a soldier in rags. The terms on which Garibaldi enlisted his men were these: he paid them nothing, he gave them no clothes, he gave them no food, and if they looted the Italians he shot them. The Englishman got to talking with the boy in rags about the situation. Yes, he was depressed. He said: 'The other day, as I was sitting here on the hill, I was wondering how long I could stand it, or whether I would go, desert. Things had got so far, then he came by. I had never spoken to him. But he saw me and came up to me, put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Courage, to-morrow we shall fight for our country!" Do you think I could go after that?'<sup>1</sup>

Even for practical success in every great enterprise there is a clamant need of leadership. The best designs and the best organizations will come to little without some inspiring head. Every great work needs a controlling brain and heart, a centre for affection and devotion. In every sphere we are ready to welcome the commanding influence, if only the pre-eminence be justified by qualities that warrant it. We even content ourselves with sham leaders when no better are forthcoming; and Carlyle is right when he insists that the sole problem is to find out the true heaven-born leaders, to select the real heroes if such are to be had at all. In religion, and politics, and social service, even in business, we need the inspiring influence of leaders. We are all natural hero-worshippers. It is the dream of youth to be some day swept into the circle of which a true and great man is the centre, to do his bidding gladly, to move to any mission at his request, proud to serve in some great cause.

Shine on us all in armour, thou Achilles,  
Make our heart dance to thy resounding  
tread.

2. The history of the world would be different if the influence of even a few of its great men had been left out. We sometimes think we can explain a great man by our common phrase, that he was the creature of his time; and there is usually much truth in the use of the phrase. The leader gets as well as gives. He cannot be put in a separate category as a thing apart, as if he were a peculiar creation, unrelated to the past and independent of the present. The great

<sup>1</sup> T. R. Glover.

world-movements do not owe their origin to one man's thought, they grow from the needs of the time, the slowly gathering vital forces that will find outlet. The Reformation, for example, was greater than the reformers, greater than Luther or Calvin or Knox. But the acknowledged truth of all this gives us no warrant for imagining that we have explained the great man by calling him the creature of his time. If he brought no free and individual force to the situation it would only be where it was.

It is a foolish way to treat history as if it were in a vacuum, the whirl of impersonal forces without any definite human connection. We have got so scientific to-day with our tendencies and streams of influence and movements of thought, though it is not easy to see how there can be spiritual tendencies without spiritual beings, and moral influence without moral life, and movements of thought without thinkers.

We say also in similar strain that the occasion makes the man ; and the truth of that is evident. Sometimes rather the man makes the occasion, comes with his new message of truth, his new vision of good, his fresh inspiration of duty ; and it is his coming which is the occasion. History is impossible without biography ; and some history is an enigma to us because we cannot learn the source of the hidden unseen power at its heart, the inspiration that gave life to the deeds.

3. After all the subtle magnetic force of a great man is only a common fact of life and experience seen on a larger scale than usual. Indeed the most potent influences in the world are not always the most obtrusive. In a region like this we cannot judge by the eye. The doer of it all in the Egyptian prison was a very obscure person at the time. The men and things that make the biggest splash in the world are sometimes the least important. There is usually somewhere a man behind the throne of more importance than the man on the throne. How often the real source of even a great man's strength is derived from some humble soul who shrinks from notice. You never can tell how even a word of comfort and courage will nerve another for a task which otherwise would be left undone.

¶ 'The old knight,' says Alexander Maclaren, 'who clapped Luther on the back when he went in to the Diet of Worms, and said to him, "Well

done, little monk," shared in Luther's victory and in Luther's crown.'

There is none so bereft of power, so barren of opportunity, that he may not serve in this great confederacy of good. There is none who may not share in the burden and the glory of the Kingdom of Heaven. Not a thought or an effort or a prayer is lost, not a kindly deed or a gentle word is spent for nought. In seeming inaction even, you may be the doer of whatsoever is done.

Are you wasting this sacred gift of influence on selfish ends, or hiding it in a napkin ? If you have no consecration in your life, you are losing your best gift, you are losing your soul—and the souls of others. In the great Temple of human lives, what matter who puts on the cope-stone, and the gleaming pinnacle ? What matter who does the work, and gets the credit, so that the work is done ? If you consecrate yourself to God, you will get your place, and wield your influence. What higher work is there than to help another to a clearer vision of truth, or to a nobler sense of duty, to encourage in good and inspire to high ends ?

## The Disturbing Dream

Gen. xl. 7, 8.—'Wherefore look ye so sadly to day ? And they said unto him, We have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter of it.'

It was not their dungeon, but their dream, that so disturbed Joseph's fellow-prisoners that morning. 'Wherefore look ye so sadly to-day ?' said Joseph to Pharaoh's officers, as he went his round of the prison. And they did not reply, 'Because we languish in prison ; because we have lost a very good job ; because our chances of promotion are seriously imperilled ; because we are worrying about our wives and children.' They were sad, they said, because they had dreamed a dream.

1. Shades of the prison-house, as Wordsworth has warned us, begin to close about us all as life goes on. We grow conscious of our limitations, and as those sober-liveried warders, Age and Infirmary, begin to visit us in their rounds, we grow more sensitive to the clank of chains and the creaking of locks. But none of these things is the real cause of our distress. Man has an



amazing capacity for adjustment to environment. It is not his dungeon, but his dream, that makes him look so sadly to-day. Dreams can be much more disturbing things than dungeons, a fancy far more painful than a fetter. It is the thing that has come to us from outside the prison that is so perturbing, the vision of that which we might have been, of the place which we might have filled. All the restless seeking, all the discontent to-day, is evidence that man has dreamed of something better than prison fare, some loftier destiny, some ampler sphere. The world's trouble is that of the dream that finds no explanation or fulfilment.

¶ The prisoner of Chillon had become accustomed to his lot; his narrow darkened cell had grown quite homelike with the years; he had made friends of spiders and the like, was in a way content; till one day, moved by some sudden whim, he clambered up the wall, holding on by hands and feet and the curves of his body, to the high little window, and looked out on the glorious lake, and the blue heavens, and his own white home nestling yonder among the dear hills, looked for a second, and dropped back. But how dark it had grown! How cramped and narrow and intolerable, choking him like a grave! Ah, God! he cried, beating upon the door, I must get out, must get out, must get out!<sup>1</sup>

2. 'Do not interpretations belong to God?' said Joseph to the sad-visaged prisoners. 'Tell it me, I pray you.' How men long for sympathy and understanding, an ear in which they can tell their dreams and whisper their desires! The world to-day needs, more than anything else, some one who will take it back to God, some one who will encourage it to give its confidence. 'Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell it me, I pray you.' Joseph is not too busy to stop and listen to the story of the strange, perplexing dream.

That is why the Man Christ Jesus is saving the world from despair once again, because He visits each in the narrow confines of his cell, seeing the troubled look, and inviting the confidence of each sufferer. He takes us back to God. Jesus explains life to us, showing us for what we were meant. He came down and shared our prison fare in order that He might do this thing for us. 'Tell it me, I pray you,' says

<sup>1</sup> A. J. Gossip.

the voice which speaks as never man spake. And they tell it, 'each man his dream.' He knows; He makes it plain. It takes One who was tried in all points like as we are, yet without sin, to tell us the meaning of life.

¶ 'There's nothing to be afraid of in the dark; and, besides, the angels are near you.' To say that neither quietens the fear of the child, nor satisfies his need of comfort. 'Mummie, I don't want angels; I want a *skin face*,' said a small boy, going to the very root of the philosophy of the Incarnation. God the Father did not put His children off with angels. He gave them what they craved—bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh.

Joseph was the very man to trust with the secret of a dream, for he, too, had been a dreamer of dreams. 'Tell it me, I pray you,' says a greater than Joseph. In His words and in His deeds, in His life and in His death, He has showed us all. He came to tell us that this yearning for freedom is the earnest of our inheritance; that it is no delusion of the night, the offspring of sorrow and despair, that we shall yet stand before the King, and serve Him at His table. He has shown us that there is no destiny too high, no dream too exalted, for the prisoners who are continuing a season in ward. There is no key to life save that which Jesus offers. You will look sadly to-day, and more sadly still to-morrow, and saddest of all on your last day, if you have not sought the consolation and salvation which He brings.

3. A wonderful sense of peace must have stolen into the hearts of Pharaoh's two officers as they unburdened themselves into Joseph's sympathetic ear. And when we say that we do not forget that the issue of the one dream meant glory, and the issue of the other betokened death. One man is restored to his place at court; to the other it is given to be delivered for ever from the whims of men, and after life's fitful fever to sleep well. Joseph's interpretations must have brought the two men great comfort and great strength, the one to live and the other to die. It makes all the difference when we know that the issue of our lives, whatsoever it may prove, is not the accident of chance, but part of an ordered plan. It is the uninterpreted life that is hard to live. It is the uncertainty that torments. If we knew that we would glorify God either by living or by dying,

either were easy to accept. 'Interpretations belong to God,' said Joseph; and he knew what he was talking about, for some of his own dreams had cost him dear. And we may be sure that there was something in the tones of his voice, something in the look in his eye, something in the grasp of Joseph's hand, as he said good-bye to the doomed baker, that made him quiet and brave.

It is neither the mystery of life nor the fear of death that brings an ache to our hearts when we sit alone with our thoughts. The sadness is in this, that we know we were made for bigger and better things than we have ever yet reached. We may be certain, however, that if our dreams and visions are lofty, we shall not be left to languish in doubt and uncertainty for ever. For our dreams are ever where our treasure lies. And if they are about the dignity of service, of pouring the red wine of life into the King's own cup, watching the blossoms of endeavour shoot forth, as that old Egyptian officer watched them in his so vivid dream, we know that we shall never be mocked of Him who sends the dream and holds its key. For, whether we live or whether we die, whether we seem to succeed or whether we imagine that we have failed, we know that we are His. It is ours only to think of our King and how best we may serve Him according to our differing gifts. And then, whether our dream lead to promotion in service here, or to promotion in higher courts, we know that we are doing God's will; and that brings peace. Ours is the part greatly to dream; the interpretations belong to God.

'After three days,' said Joseph; and so it came to pass. There was no prison in all the land of Egypt that could hold men who could dream like that. No prison could for ever hold Joseph himself, dreamer of the greatest dreams of all, and therefore able to help all such as dream. 'After three days,' we Christian folk repeat; for it was not possible that hell and the grave with combined force could hold in their prison-house the sympathy and the understanding and the love that dwelt in Jesus.

And still He comes to each of us who is conscious of his limitations, comes to them that are in ward in what is after all the Master's house, saying, 'Wherefore look ye so sadly to-day?' 'And they said unto him, We have dreamed a dream, and there is none that can

interpret it. And he said unto them, Do not interpretations belong to God? tell it *me*, I pray you.'

## The Gift of Forgetfulness

Gen. xli. 51.—'God hath made me to forget' (R.V.).  
Phil. iii. 13.—'Forgetting the things which are behind' (R.V.).

1. A WELL-KNOWN fable tells how an oriental king was once approached by a magician who offered him, upon terms, the gift of a perfect memory. The king's answer was to the effect that he would give him all that he possessed if the magician could teach him not to remember but to forget! There are times when we all have the same desire, times when we are only too well aware that we simply must forget some things in which we have been concerned, actively or passively, if we are to live in any degree worthily, times when we realize that the past though it may be dead is by no means done with. So large and influential a part does memory play in our lives that it forces upon us the certainty that if the salvation of God is a reality it must somehow give us deliverance from a domination which is as determined as it is elusive.

The man who, more than any other, has left upon record the governing impulses of a life which, by its consistently pursued purpose, shames us all, says 'This one thing I do, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.' But he prefaces this declaration by 'forgetting the things which are behind.' And without question Paul had things enough to forget, things which, if he had not forgotten them, would literally have swamped him, nightmares which would have darkened his every day. Then, in the same burst of confidential self-disclosure, he tells how he has 'learned the secret' of the life which is ever approximating to the life of Christ his Lord. He has acquired the art of discriminating forgetfulness in His school. He 'can do all things'—even this—'through Christ who strengthens' him. In short, he has found in the grace of God, which for him spells Christ, a Divine gift of forgetfulness. It is there for his appropriation. He makes it his own, and it becomes a powerful factor in his life of faith and fellowship and service.



2. Paul's testimony is anticipated and confirmed by a still older experience, belonging to an earlier and less fully illumined age, on the part of one who said 'God hath made me to forget.' According to his own reading of his experience it was by this means that God helped Joseph to become the good and happy and useful man we are told he was, in face of almost every imaginable influence to the contrary. His story is one of the amazing high lights of pre-Christian times. You will recall how that there were things in his experience, insults and injustices to which he had been subjected, which might have soured and embittered him for all time had he cherished the memory of them, had he not been enabled deliberately to forget them. If ever a man was causelessly and mercilessly taken up and flung hither and thither by the forces of unprovoked enmity it was he. Resentment against the men who had lied about him, who had wronged him cruelly, and indignation cooling to unbelief against the God who had not interfered to prevent it all, would, in his case, have been natural. But he declared, 'God hath made me to forget.' So the prosperity to which he attained was not used, as it had been an instrument of retaliation. It was made to serve as an opportunity of ministering to those by whom he had been most deeply wronged. The law of 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' would have been Joseph's complete justification. Not to speak of the natural satisfaction of 'getting his own back' from those who had caused him so many years of undeserved suffering. But without doubt, had he taken that way he might have had the joy of retaliation, but only at the cost of irreparable injury and loss to himself. For it is a double-edged weapon. It is full of significance that he explains his almost unnatural restraint by declaring that God had wiped the whole succession of painful and provocative episodes out of his mind! He had actually made him to forget! He had given him other things to remember! And by the same token He had made him the wise, gracious, kindly, strong, disciplined man his brothers discovered him to be.

3. Does God still bestow this gift of forgetfulness upon His children? Are hurtful, hateful, resentful recollections still blotted out from their minds if they are willing they should be? Is there a ministry of His love which invests

their faculty of memory with an instinct of discrimination? Or are the inward registrations of the past indelible? Are they beyond the reach of the grace of Jesus Christ? Are all the avenues to soul-satisfaction in the present and the future inexorably and for ever blocked by tenacious intrusions of the past?

We are all only too well aware how sieve-like are our memories for good things, for sincerely meant intentions and vows, and even for the very words of God. How soon these slip from us. And on the other hand how sponge-like they are for the things that are evil and enslaving, for the words that burnt—and still burn—like corrosive fluid. How changeable, how powerfully resistant to any attempt to control and direct them, are our memories. And how dominant and despotic. If there is a liberty wherewith Christ sets His servants free, if there is a 'peace which the world cannot give,' if there is such a thing as 'a heart at leisure from itself to soothe and sympathize' and at the same time to prosecute the aims and extension of the Kingdom of God, they must, in the nature of the case, be bound up with a Divine gift of forgetfulness.

¶ 'Vain,' says Carlyle, 'was the prayer of Themistocles for a talent of forgetting': if we forget many things that we should like to remember, we remember many things that we should like to forget; for our foolish blunders and our sins seem to strike their roots so deep in our memories that we can never get quit of them.<sup>1</sup>

My soul is sailing through the sea,  
But the Past is heavy and hindereth me.  
The Past hath crusted cumbrous shells  
That hold the flesh of cold sea-mells  
About my soul.

The huge waves wash, the high waves roll,  
Each barnacle clingeth and worketh dole  
And hindereth me from sailing!

Old Past let go, and drop i' the sea  
Till fathomless waters cover thee!  
For I am living but thou art dead;  
Thou drawest back, I strive ahead  
The Day to find.

Thy shells unbind! Night comes behind,  
I needs must hurry with the wind  
And trim me best for sailing.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> William Garden Blaikie: *An Autobiography*, 75.

<sup>2</sup> Sidney Lanier.

(1) Consider, for example, how, as with Joseph and Paul, memories arising out of regretted experiences in connexion with others whose lives have been associated with our own, if not somehow effectively effaced, will inevitably ruin life's quality and divert its loftiest determination. There are within the still-living history of most of us grievances legitimate enough, slights gratuitous enough, wounds cruel enough, which, if indulged will simply poison, embitter, and envenom our lives to their complete undoing. We dwell in thought on them only at disastrous cost to ourselves and with devastating influence upon our Christian witness and service. For brooders are seldom, if ever, builders. And that is our high calling. There are thorns which, if not taken out of the quivering flesh, will so thoroughly infect life with the deadly virus of self-pity and wounded self-esteem as to render it unready and unfit for Christ's service.

(2) Or consider the memory of our own past as it directly concerns ourselves alone—others only incidentally if at all. For we have all hurt ourselves far more than any others have ever hurt us. Indeed, in the last analysis, you are the only person who can ever hurt you! And the challenge of our own past is constantly confronting us. This is the witness of our best hours, our hours of worship, the hours when we desire above all things to draw near to God and to holiness. What Paul calls 'the things that are behind' are constantly reminding us that they are not so very far behind. We are only too well aware that some of the things we would fain have done with have by no means done with us. There have been in the record of most of us mistakes, desertions, driftings, and even worse—deliberate choices of things unholy. These all combine to invest life with disabling memories which contrive to paralyse new intention and to strangle new effort before it comes to birth. In respect of such crippling, tameless, irrepressible memories as these, which time and again stampede our every defence and get the better of us, is it possible for people like ourselves to share the experience of Joseph and Paul? Does God still make men to forget? Is there some gift of obliteration latent in the gospel of Christ by which we may actually forget the things we should forget? Some rich endowment which awaits our discovery and appropriation? Can it be that there is available

a Divine provision by which the greatest of life's handicaps can be removed, and all our powers be set free to pursue the responsibilities of our high calling?

4. That there are things more trivial and of less moral significance than those we have suggested, we are well aware. For we all know how much more we involuntarily forget than we recall, with any definiteness of our thoughts, of the books we read, of the words we hear and say, of the regular and casual contacts we make with life. If it were not so the mind could not bear the sheer weight it must carry. How much more, also, we instinctively forget than we remember of our sorrows and griefs. If time did not blunt their keen edge life's entire fabric would break down, its ordinary duties would be quite insupportable. It is not that we become harder of heart, or less keenly aware of our bereavements, or less loyal in our affections. As a matter of fact we are quite persuaded that we shall carry the marks of the strokes that have maimed and devastated us to the grave. It is rather that a subtle ministry of God's care re-creates us by causing us to forget. All of which goes to convince us that whether it is exercised wittingly or unwittingly our native power of forgetfulness—which is the gift of God—is a most important and influential factor of our lives. What, then, in regard to our heavy moral and spiritual handicap? Is it conceivable that the love which has not overlooked the minor contingencies of life has made no provision for its major emergencies?

One of the most amazing declarations of the gospel is that God asserts His own forgetfulness of our sins. Where is the penitent who has not found peace in the assurance that 'their sins and iniquities will I remember no more for ever?' If we may think of God in terms of human consciousness it is His remembrance of Calvary that assures His forgetfulness of our sins.

Of course, human nature being what it is, we may actually snatch at His forgetfulness selfishly, unethically. It is only when our forgetting of the things that are behind us is a means to an end—that is a means toward better living—that it can be identified with the redemptive energies of a Holy God. Only the man who is softened by his penitence, and girt about with sincere purpose, can claim this gift with any



confidence. And the illumination of his soul with the love-light which focuses in Christ and radiates from Him, the filling of his vision with the glories of the forward look, the quickening of all his impulses to grateful service will increasingly cause every old, hurtful, shameful memory to fade.

The same, too, is true in respect of those other embittering memories which incite to resentment, akin to those which Joseph must have had and which he so splendidly overcame. Here is the assurance of the gift which sterilizes the seeds of animosity and recrimination: 'He, the Spirit of Truth, shall bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.' Which means for us that in all such experiences as have bitten into us and have lodged themselves in our memories He has actually been speaking to us. Through them all He has been carrying out His good-will towards us, correcting, teaching, restraining, fitting us for the service of His love in the world. And we forget the second causes in remembrance of the First Love. As a simple matter of fact we could have 'learned Christ' in no other way than by having this fellowship in suffering with Him, by treading in His own steps.

### The Sin Against the Child

Gen. xlii. 22.—'And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also his blood is required.'

HERE, in the patriarchal age, a profound spiritual truth is declared, one echoed by St Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians when he said, 'we are members one of another,' and endorsed by the discoveries of modern science. You cannot harm the part without affecting the whole; you cannot think one evil or unworthy thought without causing sadness in the mansions of eternity. It is as the mystic Francis Thompson wrote:

All things by immortal power,  
Near or far,  
Hiddenly  
To each other linkèd are,  
That thou canst not stir a flower  
Without troubling of a star.

This does not apply to physical things merely, and is not exhausted by the law of the conservation of energy; it is equally valid in the realms of the mental and spiritual. The perfection of the whole demands the perfection of the part; the happiness and completed life of the individual implies the happiness and completed life of the race.

Nowhere is the essential unity of existence more self-evident and impressive than in the ceaseless ebbing and flowing of the generations of men. The children of to-day will be parents in a to-morrow that we are making now and their children will suffer for our deeds. 'Spake I not unto you saying Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also his blood is required.' What Reuben means is this—their original sin against Joseph, when they sold him into slavery, did not end with Joseph's suffering, but, years after, that act of hatred involved the innocent Benjamin as well.

1. We cannot restrict the range of our actions or our thoughts, for they are infinite and unending. We may desire to harm our enemies and benefit our friends, but, in reality, no such distinction is possible, for the poison we drop in the flowing river of life must at last permeate the whole. Our thoughts and actions now are setting forces in motion that will largely decide the destiny of the coming generation.

No one can deny the importance of the personal consciousness of God's presence in life or the necessity for that spiritual rebirth which is the kernel of New Testament teaching. But as we were not created for ourselves alone, so we are not redeemed for any selfish purpose. The supreme object of personal salvation is to enable us to take part in the progressive redemption of mankind. If we are saved, it is mainly that we in turn may become saviours and by our conduct and ideals do something to improve and ennoble the life of the world. True religion begins by being personal; it ends by being impersonal. It creates the life of the soul, not that it may exult in its privilege and power, but that it may play a part with Christ, however humbly, in the gradual redemption of humanity.

There is infinitely more beauty and romance about the gospel of service than there ever can be in the gospel of selfishness, however decked in the trappings of power. A noble cause never

lacks followers, though, like Garibaldi, it can only offer wounds and death, for it appeals to the best and deepest instincts in human nature, Living for the purest ideals and highest motives may not bring us any present material gain, but we may rejoice in the knowledge that we are doing something to establish a happy and a righteous inheritance for the generations to come.

When, therefore, we exist for selfish ends alone, and are hostile or apathetic to the great progressive movements of the world, then, like Joseph's brethren, we sin against the child. Surely indifference is at the root of all evil, for it is that on which the evil thrives. Most people are well-meaning enough, but there is no driving force behind their benevolence. They give a lukewarm assent to the doctrines of Christ, to the ethical principles of the Kingdom of God, and then go away and think about something else, about food and raiment, or money and pleasure. If we would only give to spiritual things a quarter of the interest and energy we give to worldly things, then the Kingdom of God would be within our reach.

2. To a large extent we are the artificers of the future, both for the child that is and the child that is to be. 'Do not sin against the child,' by selfishness or apathy or refusal to bear your share of responsibility in the shaping of that new world-order whose foundations are righteousness and love. We are responsible, not only for the environment of the child, but also for the ideals and principles which that child will bring into the future. Are we giving the child the right training, the right outlook, the right aim? Are we giving it a religious conception of things, so that it understands clearly that this life is but the preparation of the soul for a higher and a fuller life hereafter? Are we trying to educate it into a genuine spiritual experience, so that it will learn to subordinate the things of the body to the things of the mind and soul? Are we teaching it self-knowledge, self-reverence, self-control? Are we laying as the foundation-stones of its being the supreme realities of the soul and God and immortality?

¶ Martin Grove Brumbaugh, a prominent American educationalist, writes: 'One of the best men I ever knew gave to this country three splendid sons, loyal, capable, and conscientious.

I once asked him how he managed to do it. He said, "I have always made my boys my companions." In the intimate comradeship of father and son there arose the occasion to teach the boys what it is to be a really fine American and a Christian gentleman. All parents holding love for children and country will endeavour to perform their most important duty of maintaining and imparting high ideals, for as never before we must give intelligent guidance to our children.

'My own father, after church on Sunday afternoons, often accompanied his three boys to the mountains or forests. There in the cool and silence he gave us many suggestions that have ripened into inestimable good in the years that have come and gone since he can no longer walk with us. We do not see him but we follow his fine teachings.'

The responsibility of the parent and teacher and of all who come into contact with young life cannot easily be exaggerated or over-emphasized. Indeed, the strain and burden of it are so great that we cannot hope to bear them worthily apart from the help and inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God. Unless we possess a genuine spiritual life ourselves we are almost sure to fail. We cannot give to the child or to posterity what we lack ourselves. We must begin with our own minds, and our own reading, and our own intellectual discipline, and our own conversation. We must attend to our own hearts, our desires and temptations and aspirations. We must be religious ourselves, not, in any merely pietistic sense of that ambiguous word, but in ever-increasing loyalty and ever-deepening reverence. On this depends the spiritual atmosphere we radiate, which is even more important than what we do or say.

¶ 'That which we *are*,' says Emerson, 'we shall teach—not voluntarily, but involuntarily. Thoughts come into our minds by avenues which we never left open, and thoughts go out of our minds through avenues which we never voluntarily opened. Character teaches over our head.'

Some people carry with them the suggestion of God's presence, of something beautiful and holy, wherever they go. Their souls, nourished in the soil of love and faith, give forth bloom and fragrance to the weary passer-by. To be with them is like resting in the quietness of a great forest at the close of a summer's day. It is beatitude and peace. It is the subtle essence



that streamed from the personality of St Francis, and all who have lived in close relationship with Jesus Christ.

If we would truly ennoble the world and benefit the children of the present and the future, we must follow humbly in the steps of our Lord and Master. We must be rich in the treasures of the Spirit—love, joy, peace. If religion reigns at the centre of our life, then, whether its circumference be great or small, its influence must permeate the whole. Thus, however impersonal or unselfish our ambition may be, we cannot afford to neglect the health of our own spiritual nature. He who would pour out must also replenish.

It is our duty, not only to strive, by work and prayer, for the right environment, but also to prepare the child, by a careful inculcation of spiritual principles and ideals, to receive and appreciate that environment when it comes, and to labour itself for its attainment. We can only hope to succeed in this great enterprise if, in the words of Paul, 'we are new creations,' born again of the Spirit and resolved to yield 'the utmost for the highest.'

## A Sea of Troubles

Gen. xlii. 36.—'All these things are against me.'

In his long and tortuous career Jacob had had many sunless days, but the darkest and most tragic day of all was that at which he had now arrived. Joseph he took for dead. Simeon was a prisoner in Egypt. Mysterious hands were trying to clutch Benjamin and drag him from the sheltering of home. And all this happened simultaneously, and in a period of protracted famine, when sorrows would be more difficult to bear. It was the coming together of many evil things, the dark concurrence of them, and the common incidence, that made the patriarch cry, almost in despair, 'All these things are against me.'

1. That dark hour which Jacob reached is an hour which everybody reaches. There come days when that which tries the spirit is the simultaneous incidence of evils. For, if every man finds that he has his good days, in which life moves forward like a strain of music, in which work prospers and he feels equal to every

demand, and every friend he meets with is friendly, so every man has his bad days when his whole world seems to have gone awry, when work seems useless, when every voice is jarring, and when vexation follows hard upon vexation. It is not a new experience—Jacob knew it well; and so did Job. If we have times when everything goes against us, let us remember that the saints and heroes of the past have been familiar with the same experience.

When sorrows come, they come not single spies,  
But in battalions.

So speaks the King in *Hamlet* of the rising sea of troubles which threaten to engulf Ophelia, and so speaks also the common experience of men.

May we not say that in the life of Jesus, too, we find traces of this unequal pressure? No one can study the gospel with an unbiassed mind without detecting that experience there. The sunshine and shadow in the life of Jesus were unequally and irregularly distributed. There were days for Him when every voice made music; there were hours when everything seemed to be against Him. Had it been otherwise, the Bible dared not have written that He was tempted in all points like as we are. In that famous story of the chivalry of Switzerland you remember how Arnold von Winkelreid met his death. He gathered the spears of the Austrians together, and pierced by twenty points fell for his country. So to our Lord there came the hour of darkness when sorrows were massed and gathered as to a common centre, and pierced, not by one shaft but by a score, He died as a sacrifice upon the Cross.

2. But the comfort of the text is this—the things that seem against may not be really so. Jacob thought that Joseph was dead, slain out at Dothan; and Joseph was prime-minister of Egypt. He thought that Simeon was in the hands of enemies; and the most powerful statesman in Egypt was his friend. He thought that Benjamin would be seized and slain in Egypt; and over Benjamin a brother's love was yearning. Things never seemed blacker with Jacob than just then: as a matter of fact things never had been brighter. He cried 'All this is against me,' and he thought it was; but

then, if ever in his life, the flowing tide was with him.

'*All these things are against me!*' Yet those things,

Those very things were God's machinery  
For working out your heart's imaginings,  
For turning hope to blessed certainty.  
Oh, man who walked by sight,  
You should have known the darkest hour of night

Is just before the earliest streak of grey.  
Your wagons, all the time, were on their way!<sup>1</sup>

That this is not an exceptional experience we may discover from the Apostle Paul. He too, like Jacob, had his period when everything seemed to be against him. Child of freedom, he found himself in bonds. With the wide world calling him, he was a prisoner. Eager to preach the gospel to the nations, he was fettered to a Roman soldier. And yet that hour, when all his heaven was dark and everything seemed to be against him, lay right on heaven's highway to his dreams. What an infinite debt we owe to that imprisonment! These fetters have revived the world. There is a depth and compass in the prison epistles that witnesses to brooding hours of seclusion. If Paul's dream was to tell the world of Christ, and to proclaim the evangel to the nations, his dream was reaching fulfilment in the prison-house even more than in his wandering liberty. Jacob cried 'All these things are against me,' and they were never brighter than just then. Paul cried 'All these things are against me,' and just then the flowing tide was with him.

As it was with Jacob and with Paul, so it is with every one of us. God wraps His blessings up in strange disguises, and we rarely have faith to see into their heart. We have known lives that suddenly were burdened and the burden at the first seemed quite intolerable; yet the will has been so strengthened and the heart so nerved in the very bearing of the unlooked-for load—it has so widened the sympathies, enlarged the outlook, and deepened and sweetened all the springs of character—that by the end of the day the burden is transfigured into the love-gift of Almighty God. Like Jacob we cry, 'All this is against us, it is marring our happiness, it is spoiling our lives'; and

<sup>1</sup> Fay Inchfawn.

God in His infinite wisdom lets the thorn remain, and whispers, 'My strength is made perfect in thy weakness.'

¶ Smetham the artist, in one of his charming letters, says something very suggestive about painting. He says that for painting certain parts of a picture *a dark day is the best*. And it may be that God, who made and loves the sunshine, knows that now and then dark days are best, if life is ever to be a thing of beauty.

¶ There is an old and beautiful legend of St Christopher that has come down to us from the mediaeval Church. St Christopher, who was a man of great prowess, was a ferryman, and lived on the bank of a broad and swift-flowing river. And one winter's night when he was an old and white-haired man he heard a voice calling him from across the river, and wading over, there was a little child who begged the ferryman to carry him across. St Christopher did it, for he loved his Lord; putting the little child on to his back he plunged into the stream; but the weight grew heavier and heavier as he advanced, until in mid-stream where the torrent swirled and swept, the burden became well-nigh insupportable, and the old ferryman breathed a prayer to God that he might not fail in his duty to the stranger. He struggled on until the bank was reached, and he stooped to let his burden down, and then in a twinkling the night shone as the day and he saw that the traveller he had borne was Christ.

3. The things that seem against us, then, may not be really so; but, whether they are or not, we may still triumph.

At the beginning of last century in Britain there were two poets whom every one was reading. The one of these two poets was Lord Byron, the other was Sir Walter Scott. Both of these poets, strangely enough, were lame; both of them knew that their lameness was against them; yet in all literary history there is nothing more notable than the different ways in which they grappled with the trial. Byron was embittered by his lameness; he brooded on it till he loathed it; the thought of it took much of the colour and the beauty out of a character that might have been very fair. But Sir Walter Scott even to his dearest friend never complained or spoke one bitter word about it, until at last 'Ah Scott,' said Byron, 'I would give all my fame to have your happiness.' If



God be for us who can be against us—all things are working together for our good. So may a man whose faith is firm and steadfast, wrestle on towards heaven 'gainst storm and wind and tide, till the light affliction which endureth for a moment, is changed into the glory of the dawn.

¶ When Matheson took farewell of his Edinburgh congregation in 1899, he described himself as 'barred by every gate of fortune, yet refusing to give in; overtaken by the night, yet confident of the morning.'<sup>1</sup>

### Sweetmeats and Corn

Gen. xliii. 1, 2, 11, 12.—'And the famine was sore in the land. And it came to pass, when they had eaten up the corn which they had brought out of Egypt, their father said unto them, Go again, buy us a little food. . . . Take of the best fruits in the land in your vessels, and carry down the man a present, a little balm, and a little honey, spices, and myrrh, nuts, and almonds; And take double money in your hand.'

1. THERE is an old story in the Bible which says that after the abating of the flood God promised Noah that He would not again smite the world as He had done, and then added these words, 'While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.' And that promise has been faithfully kept. The harvest has *not* failed. It is true that we hear of such things as 'harvest failures' in this country or in that, and we are not forgetting such tragic occurrences. But God knows nothing of these geographical divisions of ours. He takes no stock of these man-made distinctions. The world to God is just one world and all the nations make up His family. And taking the world view—the promise has held absolutely good. The harvest has never failed. If there has been a lack in one part of the world, there has been abundance in another. There was famine in Canaan—but there was corn in Egypt. If there has been want and famine in some lands it has not been because God has failed to supply, it is because man has failed in the distribution.

The truth is, we are trying to run our world on lines on which it was never meant to run. All the nations are trying to be independent of

one another, and the misery and distress from which we are suffering is the result. God made us members of one another. He made us dependent upon one another. The whole human race is to Him one great family. We depend on one another for bare sustenance. It is only when we recognize that fact of interdependence in our practical conduct of affairs that the world is going to be delivered from its distresses. But let us make no mistake—God provides, year by year, enough for all His human children.<sup>1</sup>

2. While it is true that we do not live by bread alone, it is equally true that without bread we could not live at all. Life as we know it may stretch up towards heaven but it begins on this physical plane. As some one put it once, none can be a poet or a saint or a lover unless he has recently had something to eat. No healthy, vigorous, physical life can be built up without the necessary support. Inadequate food means inadequate health. Absence of sustenance means death.

Sustenance is as essential for the mind and the spirit as it is for the body. Starve the body and the result is fatal. Starve the mind and the result is fatal also. An emaciated body is fearful to look upon. So, could we see it, would be an emaciated mind. What then of the soul? Dare we starve that? The life of the soul is our highest life. Jacob sent his sons down to Egypt to obtain food for their hungry bodies. Do we not also need food for hungry souls? The body hungers, craving for food. It thirsts, and craves for water. Is it not the same with the soul? What a terrible picture a starved soul would present could it be exposed to view!

They pass me by like shadows, crowds on crowds—

Dim ghosts of men that hover to and fro;  
Hugging their bodies round them like thin shrouds,

Wherein their souls were buried long ago.

There is a death from spiritual famine. Not because the supplies are insufficient, but because so many spend their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not. For the soul to be alive and healthy, sustenance is as much required as for the body.

<sup>1</sup> W. E. San ster.

<sup>1</sup> J. D. Jones, *Keep Festival*, 238.

3. We are agreed that where there is no sustenance there can be no life. It is also true that no healthy vigorous life can be sustained on sweetmeats. In the land where Jacob and his sons dwelt the famine was sore. They had no corn. But note what they had. 'Take,' said Jacob, 'of the choice fruits of the land in your vessels, and carry down the man a present, a little balm, and a little honey, spices, myrrh, nuts, and almonds, and take double money in your hand.' They had all these things and yet the famine was sore! This reminds us of the great truth that a famine does not necessarily involve the absence of all things, but the absence of the one essential thing. Luxuries may abound, there may be sweetmeats in plenty, and money enough and to spare. But if there be no corn there is a famine.

No argument is necessary to convince us that a *healthy physical life* is impossible on a diet of sweetmeats. Spices give a flavour to food but they are not a substitute for it. An exclusive use of sweetmeats would deteriorate the physical frame and wreck the organs of the body. Solid food is essential for a healthy life.

This is also true of *the mind*. Our intellectual faculties are capable of remarkable development and power. But only as we feed them rightly. It is vain to think we can grow mentally healthy on sweetmeats and spices. We cannot. The mind eventually becomes so flabby and weak that it cannot digest a strong thought or exercise itself upon a deep problem. The solidity is lost, and, as a consequence, a great part of real life is lost. Mental decay with ensuing death has set in.

There is a hunger which is the greatest of all. It is the hunger of *the soul*. No proof is needed of this deep hunger. We all have it, the sinner as much as the saint, the multitude outside the churches, as well as those who are within. In various ways we are all seeking to satisfy that hunger. Many there are who are seeking to satisfy their starving souls on light confectioneries. They only succeed in nauseating them. For there is nothing in spices, honey, balm, myrrh, nor even in abundance of money, to satisfy those in whose hearts God has put eternity. 'To yield the religious sentiment reasonable satisfaction,' wrote Professor Tyndall, years ago, 'is the problem of problems at the present hour.' It is scarcely correct to call it a

'sentiment.' It is a craving. Moreover, the problem of its satisfaction is an eternal one. 'There is something in man,' said Carlyle to Tyndall, 'which all your science cannot satisfy.' That something is the soul, or the real man himself. He is conscious of a hunger which remains unsatisfied after all attempts to feed it with temporary and passing things have failed.

¶ Human systems and philosophies, framed by art and man's device, are only fit for superior persons. They are too fine for humble folk. They make no provision for the elemental wants of mankind. Here is the capital defect, the distinctive failure of these ingenious theories of life: they lack the great universal note, they never come home to all sorts and conditions of humanity. It was said that Renan offered the Parisians '*bonbons* flavoured with the infinite'; and Renan is a type of those religionists who offer us not stones, but rather sweetmeats, instead of bread.<sup>1</sup>

The staple food of man is bread. Without that we cannot live. When it is unavailable then famine is with us. No matter what sweetmeats and spices we may have, if we have not bread we have not food. And, as bread is the staple food for the body, so must there be an equivalent for bread as the staple food for the soul. Where is that solid, satisfying, life-giving soul-food to be found? Listen to these words. Jesus said unto them, 'I am the Bread of Life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and they died. I am the living bread which came down from Heaven. If any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever.' These are very wonderful words. They plainly reveal that Jesus did not offer Himself as a delicacy or a luxury, but as a necessity. He is the life-giving bread, the bread of that eternal life which is more than duration of living, it is healthy quality of living. He is the food—the only satisfying food—of the soul. From all other sources of offered supply we soon turn away empty and unsatisfied.

Jesus, Thou joy of loving hearts,  
Thou Fount of life, Thou Light of men,  
From the best bliss that earth imparts,  
We turn unfilled to Thee again.

And in Him we have eternal satisfaction.

<sup>1</sup> T. H. Darlow, *At Home in the Bible*, 122.



## Can We leave our Brother Behind?

Gen. xliii. 3.—‘Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you.’

1. THE story from which these words are taken belongs to the patriarchal period of Hebrew history, when the family was still the unit of social life. It is really the story of the chances and vicissitudes that befell a family, of which Joseph is the hero; and, while we are made to follow the course of his dramatic adventures with particular interest, we are not allowed to lose interest in the family or in the fact that in him the family was to be blessed and saved from the nemesis that threatened. At a later stage in Hebrew history it was the nation that became the unit, and it was for the nation that both family and individual life were to be sacrificed.

It is this Caiaphas had in mind when he said: ‘It is expedient that one man should die for the nation, rather than that the whole nation should perish.’ The Hebrews regarded the individual, not as standing by himself, but as related to and finding his life and salvation in the family, in the tribe, and finally and most fully in the nation. Apart from the social unit, whatever it was, he had no real standing or even existence. If he committed a sin against the family, tribe, or nation he was cut off, and usually, like Achan, stoned. The real social bond of the family or tribe was love, and if that bond was broken, the whole community was endangered.

In this instance, when the family bond was broken and Joseph sold into slavery, the whole family was under a curse. They could never as a family come to God for the way was blocked by the murdered form of love lying on the threshold, over which none of them could step into the holy Presence. Neither could they come as individuals, for when they tried to pray to God, they could only hear a Voice relentlessly crying in their conscience, ‘Where is thy brother?’ Not a doubt that they meant murder; for in selling him into slavery they felt sure he would die, and they would never see his face again. But God is always bringing good out of evil. The ruling idea of the story is expressed in the words, ‘Ye intended evil against me, but God intended it for good.’ The intention to do evil must not be lightly glossed

over. God is determined that all anger, envy, malice, hatred, all that Jesus called a breach of the sixth commandment, must be for ever banished and driven out of human life and relationships; and to this end He brings those things into the exposure of the light, so that they may be seen for what they are.

2. So we may take this as axiomatic. We cannot hope to come to God if there is in our hearts any stubborn or unloving refusal to have our brother with us. No loveless soul can ever see His face. ‘Whoso hateth his brother is a murderer, and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.’ He is a centre of death rather than of life, of darkness rather than of light. He is the very opposite of what God is. He is shut out of all knowledge and vision of God. ‘He that loveth not, knoweth not God.’ ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.’ The suggestion is that if one is pure in heart he cannot be unloving. That is the literal truth. To harbour resentment, to have a bitter or an uncharitable thought is to be guilty of impurity. It seems an alarming interpretation to put on the Beatitude, but it is Christ’s own. It is full of startling and far-reaching possibilities. Purity means more than being free from gross or unclean thoughts, more than having morally clean thoughts. It means having loving and generous thoughts, gracious thoughts, thoughts of peace. No one can have peace either in his heart or in his home unless he has purity. There is no heart so unsettled as the impure heart. ‘The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.’ We shall never find domestic peace where there are wrong relationships, and the root of all wrong relationships is impurity. ‘The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable.’ Purity is the condition of all right and harmonious relationships. Any failure in harmony is a failure in purity, the condition of seeing God’s face. Any remnant of resentment, hatred, or grudge blocks God out effectively.

¶ Mrs Mark, one of the characters in Sir Hugh Walpole’s latest book,<sup>1</sup> says to the vicar’s daughter in answer to her question, ‘What makes the real difference between people?’ ‘I think the great difference is whether people are

<sup>1</sup> *The Blind Man’s House.*

generous-hearted or not. I don't mean whether people just give money away or not, but whether their hearts are generous or mean—whether they'll take risks and be generous in ideas, in love, in trust, in optimism. . . . It's the generous-hearted who see God—now, just as it was thousands of years ago.'

3. So let us think of these words spoken not by Joseph but by God Himself. 'Ye shall not see my face except your brother be with you.' Many do act as if they could go on with their worship and be religious without reference to their ordinary relationships. They seem to imagine that religion is altogether a question of divine relationship, that so long as they have a purely spiritual relationship with God, they need not worry much as to whether or not they are in right relationship with their fellow-men. But there is no such thing as a purely spiritual relationship. We cannot detach ourselves from the world in which we live and from the relationships we have one towards another. These have everything to do with our relation to God—in fact, their importance is primary, not secondary. They are the determining things in our relation to God. 'For if a man love not the brother whom he sees, how can he love God whom he does not see?' There is no practical way of showing our love to God except through our love to our brother. If we have a wrong relationship with him, we are out of relationship with God.

If we have done any one a wrong, if we have sold him into Egypt, sold him so completely that it may be impossible for us to redeem him again—he may be beyond our power—we must just do the best by the brother that remains. It was because of the wrong the brethren had done to Joseph that their little brother had to be left behind. It is a parable of how the disabling effects of our wrongdoing work out on others. Joseph knew that in leaving the little brother behind they were showing a consideration not only for Benjamin but also for the old man, their father, that was quite unusual. Yet he must see if these men are in any real way different from what they were. So he puts them to the test. He knew that the old man, their father, would never let Benjamin out of his sight, unless on the condition that the brothers, one or all of them, went surety for his life. This is what actually happened. Judah, who

was the best of them, went surety for his brother's life. And that is about the only atonement we may be able to make for the wrong done to a brother who is beyond our power to help, who may be dead and gone—just by giving our life in surety for the brother that remains.

It is a great principle, which, if it were acted on in domestic and social life, would bring heaven on earth. For it applies all round. It cuts right at the root of our race and colour prejudices, which assume preferential privilege for one race over another, even in its right to the blessings of the gospel.

¶ Some years ago C. F. Andrews, friend of Gandhi, told a company of ministers that, though he was a priest of the Anglican Church, he could no longer worship with any freedom or joy in the Church of his baptism, could have no real communion there, unless he could bring with him his brown Indian brother to the altar.

¶ When the Armistice was signed after the Great War, the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church were assembled when the news reached them. Every one was delirious with joy. They called on Bishop Quayle to give a speech. They expected him, in his eloquent and inimitable way, to laud the victory of the Allies and the glories of the peace. Instead, he arose and amazed them all by pleading that now they give just and brotherly treatment to the Negro. No victory for him that did not mean a victory for the unprivileged.<sup>1</sup>

'Ye shall not see my face except your brother be with you.' If there is any inhibitory motive in our worship with regard to our brother, or if we feel that we have been wronged by him and owe him a grudge, it is no use going on with the service or act of worship. We must put things right with our brother first; or, at all events, we must be ready to put them right the moment an opportunity occurs, if we would behold the glory of our Father's face.

It is not simply a question of doing a kind turn or a good deed to one in need; it is a question of doing something Christ-like and redemptive. It is when we go all out in real love to those in need and see Christ in the least likely and least likeable, when we are not ashamed to call even the outcast our brother, and in Christ's name claim for him a place at His feet, bringing him with us to the church we

<sup>1</sup> E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the Mount*, 115.



worship in, or to the home we live in, that we see the face of God and realize why it is so often hid from our sight.

¶ Johan Bojer says, in one of his books : 'Don't despise a single human being! He is made of the same material as mankind in general. The infinite world is mirrored in the small. You, who want to take everyone with you on the way to the great dawn help that man!' <sup>1</sup>

### With Washen Face

Gen. xliii. 31.—'And he washed his face, and went out, and refrained himself, and said, Set on bread.'

'FRIENDS, don't let me expose myself,' said Sir Walter Scott when in his last illness the pen fell from his nerveless fingers, and the tears rolled down his cheeks—'Friends, don't let me expose myself.' So it was here—a man, proud, calm, dignified, his feelings nearly overmastering him, cannot bear that any one should see his grief. 'He sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there.' But Joseph's secret affections being thus allowed their expression, he took a firm grip of himself. Once more he became the strong man with a fixed and steady purpose: he 'washed his face,' we are told, 'and went out, and refrained himself, and said, Set on bread.' One cannot help admiring that. It was a gallant thing to do.

1. There are those in our own time in whom we see this same attitude, and never without a strange stirring of the heart. We are filled with reverent admiration that so many of those bereaved by the war, whose hearts have been so cruelly wounded, have been able to set up a noble example of courage and self-control. They are not shirking any of the duties of life. They are claiming no exemption on the ground of their sorrow, and they excuse themselves from no duty merely because it would hurt. One feels that this brave defiance of the worst that can happen is what ought to be. But what if, in some instances, it is only a brave show in public while there is no such confidence in private, no great insights and certainties to steady the shaken heart behind the scenes?

Goethe was coming out of a theatre one night when he remarked to a friend about the play,

<sup>1</sup> *The Face of the World.*

'How handsome that boy looked and how well he acted his part! Who knows in how ragged a coat he may sleep to-night!' But the boy's mother happened to be near and she protested that he was her boy and came from a respectable home; to which Goethe replied, 'Ah well! to-day red, to-morrow dead.' What Goethe surmised was that behind the bright acting of the boy there might be a comfortless home, some poor garret in a grim street to which he would return when the brave display was over. Who knows in how ragged a coat the smiling sufferer may sleep to-night, with what a poor soul, destitute of consolation, he may lie down to rest? It is not what we are in public but what we are in private that decides our fate. Have we never met people who kept up a smiling appearance in sorrow and found that their heart had turned to stone, cold and hard, with no faith, no hope, no love left? That is not to be a victor over life's ordeals but to be their victim; bright in public, but dying in private. 'To-day red, to-morrow dead.' It is the ephemeral comfort of gallant pretence.

Only when I have safely  
Closed the door

Against friends and the rest  
Shall I be free  
To bow my head  
Where there is none to see.

To-night I will shed my tears.  
To-morrow when  
I talk with you  
I will be gay again.<sup>1</sup>

To be cheerful and gallant, even when hard-hit is a duty to others, a public service. Those who come out from their chambers where they have kept company with sorrow, to face life and duty with shining face and mastered feelings, are making a precious contribution to the moral steadfastness of the nation. But can we expect that brave smile to be anything more than artificial, a bright face assumed as a patriotic duty, when their heart is broken? Is there comfort in God sufficient to make that outward brightness the natural effect of inward certainty and peace? It is a test question for Christian faith, and it must be answered.

<sup>1</sup> Abigail Cresson.

2. There is comfort for all stricken hearts in the Cross. The Cross of Christ is not only a great release from the sorrows of conscience, but also a great release from the sorrows of the heart. The bereaved are made partakers of God's love, who gave His Son in youth to die for men and to lift humanity into a new future. The mother whose son has been killed in the venture for a higher order has made this sacrifice in common with God, and her sorrow is a new insight, a fresh intimacy, a close contact with His love. The comfort is that she is in touch with ultimate reality, has entered into the final truth, has experience of what the Divine grace means. God gave His Son, the best and bravest that ever lived, to die for others, and she has given her son, and so there should be henceforth a deeper sympathy, a fuller understanding between God and her, because now she shares something of the secret of His love. His saving love is clearer and nearer to her now that she glimpses by her own experience what it costs.

But the sorrowing mother may cry. 'Why should I have to give my son to die for others, even though God gave His Son for men?' It is often supposed that experience of God's love is immunity from such tragic demands, preservation from such bitter loss. But one mother is stricken while another is more fortunate, a son is taken from the one but not from the other, in the same danger, and it is a mystery why there should be any such discrimination. There is no clue to this difference in lot. Then it is asked, 'What is it all for? What good will it do? Shall we be in any better position after it?' The reply to this wistful question is that we must awaken to our solidarity as members one of another. We do not live to ourselves. The reason for sacrifice is that it is God's purpose to bind our life to the human race. Our life finds its intention, its fulfilment, its destiny, not as an isolated unit, but as an active member of mankind, a decisive force in human history. Family affections, the adventures of the heart in training a life from childhood to manhood, and the hopes entertained of what that boy will become, are a preparation for wider sympathies and larger service, an education in loving as God loves. Attachments and expectations must expand beyond the personal to the national and international with a sense of the fellowship, the common interests, of all human creatures. The comfort that steals

gently over a mother's spirit is that through her dead son she has found her vital place in the human story and is in line with God's purpose to make us co-workers with Him in the creation of a higher future for all. She has had a fresh experience of the range and anguish of God's saving love, and her abiding comfort is in the Cross.

¶ 'During the last war,' writes Professor A. J. Gossip, 'a father came to tell me of his laddie's death. His face was white, but his head was carried proudly, and there was a light shining in his eyes. And all he said was this: "I had great dreams and ambitions for my boy. I was perhaps too proud of him. But I had never hoped for anything as big as this!"'

3. There is reviving comfort in Immortality. Ages before the Christian era, men concluded there must be survival after death. In Judaism also, the idea of the immortality of the soul grew up under Greek influence and expressed itself in these stately words about the departed—

But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,

And no torment shall touch them.

In the eyes of fools they seemed to die;

And their departure was accounted to be their hurt,

And their going from us to be their ruin:

But they are in peace.

These words have steadied many hearts when precious memories of the fallen have surged up in wild regret within. Yet this consolation does not go far enough to satisfy, because it regards the dead surviving as pale spirits and cold phantoms, while the human heart craves that warm personalities should survive death. If reverence for human personality is a central tenet of Christianity, if the individual is so infinitely dear to God as Jesus Christ certified, then all the vivid characteristics which constitute personal identity must continue in the future life. Our Lord not only vouched for life beyond as a certainty when He declared that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was not the God of the dead but the God of the living; but He also affirmed that none could pluck us out of the Father's hands, because God's Fatherly love is so faithful, so retentive in its grasp that it holds on to us till journey's end and



beyond, to ensure a future for human personality in closer relations with Him. This is taught in Jesus' farewell discourse about the Father's House. Perhaps a wife or mother has been preparing the room for him who is the desire of her eyes and who is returning from the fighting zone, and has everything ready for his homecoming, but he never comes. That wrings the heart, and the sorrowing wonder amid their sobs what it is like to die suddenly, to go out amid smoke and flame, with the last darkness rushing down on consciousness. But is there no tender and hospitable preparation for that dear fellow elsewhere, and are wives and mothers kinder than the princely Friend who said, 'I go to prepare a place for you'? Human love is a hint and prophecy of what Divine love must be, and all the attention parents would like to lavish on their sons will be far surpassed by God's provision for them in eternity. Our Lord gave His sanction to such confidence in the Divine care—'If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your heavenly Father!' Yes, and when some golden lad goes out suddenly

Between the bullet and its mark  
Thy face made morning in the dark,

and the young heart was lighted home, 'to God the Judge of all and to the spirits of just men made perfect.'

A poet tells of a lonely peasant who fell asleep one night by his humble inglenook and dreamed that his life could be glorified by great companionships; for in his dream he beheld the low rafters of his mean hut transformed into a lofty dome covered with the masterpieces of the ages, while his grey, grim hearth became a golden altar over which hovered the angel forms of his departed children; and what did the dream imply but that princes of the royal blood should not dwell in hovels? The sorrowing need not lie down in a ragged coat, shut in with wretchedness, when life can be exalted by great insights and great certainties. Jesus Christ has made us kings and priests to God, brought us into such close touch with the royal Father that we are also in close touch with the noble departed now living in Him. If we are committed to God by faith in Jesus Christ, then we begin eternal life in time, here and now, we have heaven in the heart, and the nearer we

are to God in spirit and action, the nearer we are to the shining company who have passed on. The shabby-looking house of life is lifted into higher dimensions by converse with the invisible God and His invisible servants.<sup>1</sup>

¶ The tragedy of the Great War nearly broke Rhondda Williams' heart. In a letter which was written to the church on the occasion of the death of his son Eric, killed in the war, he said: 'My precious boy has left the fighting line, and joined the great unseen Fellowship of Reconciliation . . . all that he was and is demands of me a new consecration to my work. I have to lend a hand to other "strugglers with the troubled sea." My boy would have me not self-centred in my sorrow, but working my utmost for a new world here until the time comes to join him in the Land of Light.'<sup>2</sup>

I tell you they have not died :  
They live to breathe with you,  
They walk now here at your side,  
They tell you things are true.  
Why dream of poppied sod  
When you can feel their breath,  
When flowers and soul and God  
Know there is no death ?

I tell you they have not died :  
Their hands clasp yours and mine,  
They are now but glorified,  
They have become divine.  
They live ! They know ! They see !  
They shout with every breath,  
All is eternal life,  
There is no death !

### Servants of the Cup

Gen. xlv. 17.—'The man in whose hand the cup is found, he shall be my servant.'

'PUT my cup, the silver cup,' said Pharaoh's prime minister, 'in the sack's mouth of the youngest.' It was a trick. If we did not know the whole story we would add, a shabby trick. But it was inspired by love. It seemed like the giving of unnecessary pain and anguish of mind : it really was the prelude to revelation and glory and joy unspeakable. It was, moreover, con-

<sup>1</sup> A. A. Cowan, *Captain of the Storm*, 187.

<sup>2</sup> *How I Found My Faith*.

trary to what one might have expected from a surface knowledge of the bare facts, the favourite brother who was made the seeming victim of the damning burden.

Is it not the drama of life as we know it? It seems ever to be those who should be God's favourites, the objects of His tenderest love and care, who are marked out for special anguish and discipline. It is in the sack of the weakest that the terrible discovery is made. The innocence of such is apparent even to the worldly brethren. The thing seems intolerable. They would not have treated Benjamin so. Judah will even now stand in and bear the unmerited suffering that should fall on him. But no; like inexorable Fate the law of the Egyptian potentate decrees: 'The man in whose hand the cup is found, he shall be my bondman.'

1. *The Commitment of the Cup.*—The commitment of the cup none can evade. He in whose sack it is found must bear the blame and suffer the consequences of its being there. A shabby trick, is the quick verdict of the world's rough-and-ready judgment. Joseph has had his joke; let him enjoy it if he can. Let him laugh while his helpless brother weeps. That is all the world can make of it. Thomas Hardy gives us the outsider's last word on it all in the well-known exclamation, 'The President of the Immortals had finished his sport with Tess.'

But the teaching of Jesus is just that where the novel ends the gospel begins. Joseph had not finished his sport with Benjamin. What seemed on the face of it a cruel, heartless joke, was in reality the careful planning of infinite love. Joseph could have let them go away into their own country with bulging sacks, 'as much as they can carry,' and every man's money in his sack's mouth. And one day the fullest sack would have been empty, and all the money spent, and the owners as hungry and hard bested as ever. Joseph had a better plan for them than that. He wanted at all costs to bring them back to himself. He had a revelation to make to them, a revelation of love, of power, of infinite resource 'exceeding abundant above everything they could ask or think.' Yet they would never have known it, their joy would never have been full, had it not been that more was found in Benjamin's sack than corn and coin.

If your object in life is to get away with a good full sack of corn, as much as you can carry, and your money in your sack's mouth, well, you may do it; but one day you will be hungry still. And in His infinite mercy, love, and wisdom, He to whom we go in prayer merely to plead, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' gives us more than that. God does not withhold from us the good things of this life. The instructions were quite definite to put Benjamin's 'corn money' in his sack also. But the cup was the first and most important thing. And if you have found the cup of suffering, the cup of the fellowship of the Man of Sorrows in your sack as well, you will not talk about cruel tricks and complain about an unjust fate. You will say, 'The cup which my Elder Brother has put in my sack, shall I not drink it?'

2. *The Comfort of the Cup.*—It was Joseph's steward who slipped that incriminating chalice into the unsuspecting Benjamin's sack. He could do nothing to avoid the consequences. And so it ever is in life. We seem to be perpetually 'let in' for things, as we say. Circumstances, accidents, one thing and another seem to shape and control our conduct. The burden is somehow or other laid upon our shoulders, and we have got to bear it. There is this commitment and that, this duty, that care, that bit of work or responsibility—we really don't know how we became saddled with it at all. These things just seemed to happen. The cup somehow found its way into our sack, and we could not get past that bare fact. How did it get there? We would never have dreamed of taking it. Circumstance, accident, bad luck, we say; not knowing that it was a servant of a higher will that committed us, the servant obeying the behest of a Brother's love, a Brother's plan to bring us to His nearer presence.

Fuller knowledge brings the comfort of the cup. It was Joseph's own cup which he had his servant put in his younger brother's sack. The kiss of his own lips was upon it; the wine of his deep drinking had gleamed in it. Knights of old rode out that they might seek the Cup from which the Saviour of the world had drunk. They counted no loss or suffering too great if only at the end of the long, long quest they might even see the Holy Grail. The cup is not far to seek. It is in our own sack, if so be that we have the privilege of the Brother's love, the



Brother's deliberate forethought and plan to bring us closer to Himself.

Alas for us if our sacks are filling up again with corn and money, till there is no room for the cup. 'Drink, that you may forget,' says the world. 'Drink, that you may remember,' says Christ. The world puts the sack in the cup, and tries to imagine it is happy. Joseph puts the cup in the sack, and the outcome is joy. As Benjamin plodded back again to Egypt, turning his back, as it must have seemed to him, for ever, upon home and his father's face, bowed down beneath the intolerable commitment of that mysterious burden laid so wantonly upon his innocent shoulders, he was taking, little as he knew it at the moment, the first step to solve the dark problem, and to learn the comfort and the glory of the cup.

¶ Towards the close of her life, Anne Douglas Sedgwick endured great suffering in the spirit of one who has reached firm ground. 'I'm in a most dreadful state, physically,' she writes. 'I can hardly speak, nor budge my left arm, nor stand on my left leg, and eat with difficulty. Yet underneath everything, what I feel is : Thou hast brought me up out of an horrible pit. Thou hast set my feet upon a rock, and put a new song in my mouth.'

3. *The Conquest of the Cup*.—At first we are appalled by the discovery of the commitment of the cup. Then, as we begin to understand what it all means, we pass to the comfort of the cup. It is a prize, not a problem. And, last of all, life takes on its highest meaning when we recognize and bow to the conquest of the cup. 'In whose hand the cup is found, he shall be my servant.' It means that we have got past the devastating conception of life and the discipline of life as a cruel trick of a blind chance. It means that we do not measure our success in Egypt by a bursting sack and a well-filled purse. Others may be content to speak of the corn in Egypt, but we have found the mystery of the cup ; and that abides when the corn is done. The old search for the Grail was bound to be fruitless, because it is not we who find the Cup, but the Cup that finds us. 'Is not this it in which my lord drinketh, and whereby he indeed maketh trial ?' That is to say a time of sorrow, of loss, of mystery, is always a time of testing. Then it is that the real thoughts of the heart are revealed. If there were nothing found in

our sacks but corn we would be as the beasts that perish. It is the discoveries that arrest us in our easy-going ways that reveal of what we are made. The discovery of the cup revealed a changed character in Judah. He was willing now to share the sorrow of his younger brother and to suffer in his stead.

And notice that it was not any kind of incriminating evidence that Joseph ordered his steward to toss into his youngest brother's sack. He might have brought him back to himself again by a hundred different artifices. And there are a hundred devices by which God might break a man's pride and satisfaction in his well-filled sack, and compel him to turn again and seek His face. But He chooses the compulsion of the cup. The Elder Brother bids us turn again by making us sharers of the cup that He has pressed to His own lips.

There are those who have shared the cup and they know in whose fellowship they are. The anguish of heart that Joseph went through when he turned aside to weep was as real as the suffering of the brothers who knew not all that his wise love was planning and perfecting for them. 'In all their affliction he was afflicted.'

¶ I think of one who had drunk deeply of the cup of sorrow and suffering. She was an old woman before the days of old age pensions ; an old woman living in the greatest poverty in a little cottage in Ayrshire. One day a friend of mine, a young girl who used to visit her, opened the latch and went in ; and hastily old Betty took off her apron and flung it over the table. Impetuously my young friend did a thing she would have done anything to have undone afterwards, she lifted up the apron to see what her old friend was having for her meal, and before she could stop herself she said, 'Oh, Betty, it's only bread and water !' 'Aye,' said the old woman, 'it's only bread and water, but He makes it taste like wine.'<sup>1</sup>

## The Desire for Fellowship

Gen. xlv. 4.—'Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you.'

1. THE story of Joseph is one of the great stories of the world. It will always be a popular story, too, for it has a good ending. And we very

<sup>1</sup> Hubert L. Simpson.

properly prefer stories with a good ending. When we say 'a good ending' we do not necessarily mean a happy or cheerful ending. We mean by a good ending an ending which justifies God. We mean the kind of ending which is the only possible ending in a world where our God is supreme. And so, a great tragedy like *Macbeth* has a good ending; for things could not have turned out differently, and in our wisest moments we would not have had it otherwise. The story of Joseph which is familiar to all of us has, however, both a happy and a good ending. 'And Joseph said unto his brethren, come near to me, I pray you.'

These words give us an insight into the human heart as deep as we can go. If these words of Joseph mean what we understand them to mean, and when we recall the circumstances in which he uttered them, they become the revelation of the deepest yearning of the human heart. For the words are not words merely—in which a man says something to another man. The words are a cry out of the depths: 'Come near to me, I pray you. I am your brother.' It is the cry of a man that he be not left alone. It is as though he were pleading with them. 'I am a great man, as the world reckons, chief minister of this greatest kingdom of the earth. My word can dispense life or death, honour or dishonour. But believe me, it is all nothing to me and a mockery if I am not at home with you. What is power, and what the pomp of a great place in the world, if you stand there apart from me, afraid of me. If I cannot speak to you with the accent and the freedom of friends, in the very dialect of our childhood and our common home—then cursed be the day that I set out upon a course which has brought me to such a loneliness! Come near to me, I pray you, I am your brother.' Now if that be the deepest thing in man, if this yearning not to be alone, not to be apart, not to be left upon a pedestal looking silly, if this shrinking from isolation be the deepest instinct in that mysterious complex which the human heart is, then the great day for man is coming yet: and it will come when men here and there and everywhere have the courage to throw off the crust of their own pettiness and simply dare to be themselves.

2. Following the guidance of St Paul's great saying, 'There is first that which is natural, and

afterwards that which is spiritual,' let us make clear to ourselves that this shrinking from isolation is fundamental in the soul of man. If that is so then the thing that is coming to the human race is a high and loving fellowship and integration, a Kingdom of God in fact with Christ on the throne, and not the low, squalid scramble for petty triumphs.

We may know what it is to come into a room where people are already gathered: friends to one another it would appear, certainly having interests, memories, ideas in common. When we are still outside the door, we can hear the easy chatter and laughter. We are announced. Whereupon it is as though the current of human intercourse had been switched off. There is silence. Immediately every one is on his or her defence, on guard, standing to arms. If there is some social genius present, or some thoroughly simple and good man or woman who has a mind above such sad trivialities, the situation is not hopeless. He or she may bring us near to one another. But in the absence of such a saint we all begin to speak from our lips only. We talk of the weather or about something in which we have no interest. Perhaps every one is feeling precisely what we are feeling. But no one seems to know how to recall the earlier laughter and ease.

Or one day travelling you find yourself shut up for some hours with other passengers, and it may be that you are more fortunate. To your advances, your fellow-passengers respond. One thing calls up another until you find yourself at your ease. Whereupon you have an experience which later as you recall it makes you sorry and angry that such experiences are not your daily portion and are not shared by all. You discover that these people have their own life-principles, their own way of looking at things, their own interests and joys and pieties. That they have their faith, their code of honour. Above all, that they have their own ground for joy. So that if you belong to a more conventional class, farther removed from the natural fountains of life—you envy them, and wonder whether the world as presently constituted is not built upon a huge delusion. Of course, such a moment of simplicity will pass from your mind, but you may have felt what a wonderful thing this human life of ours would be if we men and women ceased to envy or suspect one another, and spoke the mother tongue



of the race—the language of kindness and humility.

¶ This pain of the soul when it feels itself isolated is the subject of Tolstoy's beautiful story *The Cossacks*. He had gone for his health as a young man to the Caucasus—to breathe that high air and to drink the milk of goats. He finds himself a stranger, a great man of the world, amongst a simple, frugal, and not unhappy people. It is the story of his envy of them, of their attitude to life, and of their simple joys. He tries to get near to them. He opens his mind now and then to one here and there, in the hope that they will understand that he is sympathetic. In the evenings at their gatherings he sings in the chorus of their folk-songs. Then there is Marianne with her freshness and fine fidelity to her own class. But how far away from him she is, how far above him in her simplicity! In his presence she is always constrained. Supposing he had the fabled wealth of the Indies he could not bring into her eyes the light which shines there when her own chosen man is near.

'Come near to me, I pray you.' This is the cry of a man to a group or class of those who ought to be his fellow-men. And with all the will in the world, they cannot come near. Something hard and bad has come in between them and will remain until some overwhelming emotion—some utter and final fear such as visits men when the earth reels beneath their feet and great chasms yawn before them—until some such emotion makes them one.

3. Now that is just our task in the world—to win each other's love, and many have been blessed enough by God to know that such love can be won. This is the bond which binds together those who have helped each other to deal worthily with life, to win it—first within a narrow and intimate circle, and then in such widening circles as life ordains—that is our task and our business in this world.

What was our Lord's historical and concrete message to His own countrymen—the thing, in fact, for accentuating which they had Him put to death? What was His appeal to the Jews of His day but just this, that they should set themselves, painfully, persistently, patiently, to win the love of the world? That God loved the whole world, and that they, the Jews, were there, and had been preserved in history, for

this very purpose—to bear that message and themselves to embody it to all men.<sup>1</sup>

If Christianity then be the presentation of the mind of Christ in history it must be to the task for which Christ died that we are called. We know the startling results which followed as soon as His visible presence was withdrawn from the earth. He built up no elaborate organization: He trusted those who loved Him, fired by His Spirit, to spread His 'way' in the world. And so it happened. Seeing the love of God in His Cross, gloriously certain of His living presence in their midst, they sallied forth to share their glorious experiences with the world of their day. And in amazing measure they succeeded. For they found—if the phrase may be used—that the thing *worked*. They found themselves, heterogeneous collection of personalities that they were, in a new and astounding fellowship. And they found that, wherever the love of Christ, the 'family' plan of the Father, was given a chance to operate, old enmities melted away, barriers broke down, gulfs closed up, and the miracle of brotherhood was actually achieved. This—this rich family life, this brotherhood of the spirit, this society built on the law of fellowship—this is 'the way of Jesus.' When are men going to try it, together, in earnest, on a scale as wide as the world?<sup>2</sup>

## A Fourth Dimension

Gen. xlvii. 8.—'Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou?'

'How old art thou?' That is a question most people do not care to answer—most people, at all events, between eighteen and eighty, before and after which youth and age are proud of their years, and are tempted to exaggerate their seniority. Outside of China it is a query which it is considered rude to put to any but an intimate friend.

But the question we wish to put is not, 'How *long* have you lived?' but 'How *much* have you lived?' Life is not measured solely by years. How much have you seen and heard and felt? How much have you loved and aspired and achieved in the depths of your own soul? The

<sup>1</sup> J. A. Hutton, *The Victory over Victory*, 6 f.

<sup>2</sup> E. S. Woods, *A Faith that Works*, 36.

moment we undertake this more accurate appraisal we discover that life has various dimensions. It has length—that we all know, and the length of a man's life can be easily stated in years and months and days. But life may also have breadth and depth and height. However it may be in mathematics, there is a fourth dimension in human experience, and we must bear all these dimensions in mind when we undertake to ascertain how much any one has lived, or is likely to live in those years that lie ahead.

1. *The Length of Life.*—Length is not the most important of the four dimensions, but it is not to be lightly regarded. A man must have some length of days, to achieve anything of value. The little child that is born to-day and dies to-morrow does not accomplish anything—it had no time to show its capacity for living. It was only a bud on the tree of life, which never opened into a fragrant blossom, to say nothing of reaching the stage of ripened fruit. It is impossible to do a day's work in ten minutes or a life-work in ten years. And how many long-lived men have done their best work when they were past sixty—some of them when they were past eighty!

¶ Tennyson was eighty-three when he wrote *Crossing the Bar*; and Goethe wrote *Faust* when past eighty. John Wesley lived to be nearly ninety, preaching, writing, travelling, organizing, until within a few weeks of his death; and some of his best work was done in his old age. Gladstone became Prime Minister three times after he was sixty years of age, and added immensely to his fame and to his usefulness by the ripened service of those later years.

Yet the length of a man's life is only a secondary consideration. The long life is not necessarily an interesting or a useful one. There was Methuselah! The modern scholars tell us that the names of those long-lived men in the Book of Genesis were probably the names of tribes rather than of individuals. However that may be, Methuselah will serve as an illustration. Here is the record of his career: 'And Methuselah begat sons and daughters and he lived nine hundred and sixty-nine years and he died.' That is all that is said about him—apparently that is all there was to say. His life was a life of one dimension; namely, length.

¶ The last of Galsworthy's Old Forsytes,

Timothy, 'that terrific symbol, the one pure individualist left,' who retired at forty and died at one hundred, leaving his money to accumulate for another hundred years, was reputed to have lived long, yet 'if life is not to be measured by years but by intensity,' he had not begun to live. So far from burning the candle at both ends, he had never even lighted it: it merely melted from his grasp.

Years are not life;  
Years are but shells of life, and empty shells  
If they hold only days, and days, and days.

How long did Jesus Christ live when He was here on earth? Not long, speaking after the manner of men. He was only thirty-three when they put Him to death on the Cross. Methuselah lived thirty times as long. But how much did Christ live in that brief time? He spent thirty of those years in mental preparation and spiritual discipline. No wonder the three years of which we know so much were great when we think of those thirty silent years of which we know so little standing behind them! How much He packed into those fleeting years of ministry to human need and of contribution to the cause of human betterment! How mighty those three years were in their holy and permanent influence upon the life of the race! When men speak of Him they do not ask, 'How long did He live?' but 'How much?' 'In Him was life,' life in all its dimensions and to this hour that life is the light of men.

2. *The Breadth of Life.*—When we come to the breadth of life how wide is that man we have in mind? We cannot tell by the use of a tape line. If he is a true man he has a certain breadth which must be measured in more vital fashion. What is the range of his interests? How far afield do his sympathies go? How many points of contact has he with the life of his city, his state, his nation?

Here is a man who prides himself on being a specialist. He emulates the spirit of that German scholar, who having given his entire attention to Greek nouns regretted on his death-bed that he had not specialized more strictly by devoting his whole life to the study of the dative case. This man is ignorant of pretty much everything outside his own particular field. In that field of interest he is as bright and as sharp



as a needle, and as narrow. He has no taste for music; he does not care for pictures; he is not interested in philosophy. He has no use for religion—to him it is all vague, uncertain, mysterious. He has narrowed his life to a single line of interest, losing out of it the fine quality of breadth.

Here is another type, the prosperous, self-made, self-satisfied man! He thinks that a man's life *does* consist in the abundance of the things that he owns. He has never allowed his interest to be deflected from his own success by any sympathetic feeling for others. He says, 'Charity begins at home,' thereby excusing himself from any participation in the benevolent activities of the day. His charity begins at home and ends there. He is more to be pitied than poor Methuselah, for his own life lacks breadth and he will not be allowed anything like nine hundred and sixty-nine years of it.

How far those men are from the Kingdom of God! How far they are from the method of Jesus! His life was broad in its sympathies, wide in the range of its interest. He could sit at meat with Zaccheus, a rich man who had been dishonest and miserly, until the man of means was moved to say, 'Half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken anything from any man wrongfully I restore him fourfold.' He could talk with the poor beggar who was born blind, until his eyes were opened and the man was saying, 'Once I was blind. Now I see.' He could talk with Nicodemus, a master in Israel, until the man of culture was born anew. He could talk with those fishermen in Galilee until they said, 'We never heard it on this fashion before.'

¶ Abraham Lincoln was only one man among the millions of men in America in his day. From the hour when he was born in that log cabin in the State of Kentucky until the day he entered the White House, he was compelled to follow a somewhat narrow path. But when he really faced his life-work he was able to enter so sympathetically into the feelings of others, northern men and southern men, white men and black men, men who were for 'peace at any price' and men who faced the stern necessity of Civil War—he entered so sympathetically into their feelings that it seemed as if the whole American people lived and moved and had its being in the heart of that greatest American. 'With malice toward none, with charity for all,

with firmness in the right as God gave him to see the right,' he gathered up all these interests into the arms of his effort to the end that 'government of the people, by the people and for the people, should not perish from the earth.' His life was not long—the assassin's bullet cut it short—but it was exceedingly broad.

God—let me be aware!

Stab my soul fiercely with another's pain.

Let me walk, seeing horror and stain.

Let my hands, groping, find other hands.

Give me the heart that divines and understands.<sup>1</sup>

3. *The Depth of Life.*—In the Parable of the Sower some seed fell by the wayside where the ground was hard and it failed to grow. Some fell among thorns where the soil was overgrown with noxious weeds and it became unfruitful. Some fell where there was no depth of earth and because the soil was thin it withered away. The sorry fate of this last bit of seed represents the failure of those lives which are shallow, superficial, all on the surface. They receive good impressions readily, and just as readily let them go. They live by custom, usage, and the easy conventions of those who surround them. They have no depth of conviction rooting down into that which is vital and fundamental. They have no deep, underlying purposes and principles of action.

Here is a life which is able to say what Jesus said, 'I come not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.' The man has a sense of mission, of purpose, of deep underlying agreement with the will of God. The whole venture and process of his activities are embedded in a moral order. They lie secure in the will and purpose of the Almighty. The man has the power which comes from depth.

¶ Off the coast of Labrador I have seen huge icebergs towering up three or four hundred feet in the air. I have seen them sailing due south in the teeth of a strong head wind. The gale was blowing from the south thirty, forty, fifty miles an hour, yet those icebergs sailed on toward the south without ever tacking. They had neither sails nor rudder by which they could tack. The secret of it lay in the fact that seven-eighths of the bulk of an iceberg is under water. The great Labrador current makes strongly toward the south. It gripped the huge

<sup>1</sup> Teichmer.

bulk of those icebergs and bore them along no matter how the wind might blow at the surface.<sup>1</sup>

4. *The Height of Life.*—The height of a man's life is not indicated by his present achievements. You cannot determine how tall he is by standing him against the door and measuring the deeds he has done or the actual attainments he has made in personal character. It is not what you have done, it is what you want to do and mean to do that tells the story. The real height of every man's life must be measured by the upward, Godward reach of his own aspiration and resolve.

Here is a man who bears the marks of moral failure written all over him. He is stained by the coarse sins of the flesh. 'How tall is that man, morally speaking?' We cannot tell until we know what he means to do with himself. If he is actually saying in his heart what a certain moral failure once said in a far country, 'I have sinned against heaven and before men; I am no more worthy to be called a man; but I will arise and go to my Father,' and if he is ready to stand up and go, putting evil behind him and putting his trust in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, then there is an earnest and a promise of future growth in him which give his life the dignity and the height of spiritual worth. Measure every man not by his present achievements but by the upward, outward reach of his aspiration and resolve.

How much have we lived—and what is more to the purpose, how much are we planning to live in those years which lie ahead? What are the measurements according to which we are laying out that spiritual edifice, that building of God, that house not made with hands, eternal in the realm of moral values?

Let us live so that length of days may be ours if it please God—then we shall not drop our task half finished. Let us open our heart to the needs and appeals of our fellow-men, that our life may have the breadth which comes from a wide range of sympathetic interest. Let us have that depth of conviction and purpose which means stability. Then let our hopes reach out among the stars as we strive to wear at last the likeness and image of the Son of God.

<sup>1</sup> C. Reynolds Brown.

## Two Views of one Life

Gen. xlvii. 9.—'Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.'

Gen. xlviii. 15, 16.—'The God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads.'

1. THESE are two strangely different estimates by the same man of his own life. In the latter, Jacob categorically contradicts everything that he had said in the former. 'Few and evil,' he said before Pharaoh. 'All my life long,' 'the Angel which redeemed me from all evil,' he said on his death-bed.

We can well imagine the feelings of this plain man of the fields as he finds himself in such strange surroundings and gazes upon the mighty ruler of Egypt. 'And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou?' The past seemed to rise before him as a dreary record of failure. The promise of life had not been fulfilled. In this mood the old man can only see the dark side of his experience, and he answered: 'Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers.'

¶ 'I have ever been esteemed,' Goethe says, 'one of Fortune's chiefest favourites; nor will I complain or find fault with the course my life has taken. Yet, truly, there has been nothing but toil and care; and I may say that, in all my seventy-five years, I have never had a month of genuine comfort. It has been the perpetual rolling of a stone, which I have always had to raise anew.'

Many have been the troubles of my life;  
Sins in the field and sorrows in the tent,  
In mine own household anguish and despair,  
And gall and wormwood mingled with my love.

. . . . . the dower  
Of innocence and perfectness of life,  
Pass not unto my children from their sire,  
As unto me they came of mine.<sup>1</sup>

But a truer estimate of life flashed upon Jacob as he neared the end. He is much weaker in body, but stronger in spirit. He recalls the providential care which had saved him from so many dangers, redeemed so many mistakes. He

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Hugh Clough.



thinks of an angel presence turning evil into good, making bitter things grow sweet all his life long. A deep sense of thankfulness wells up within him, and he can bequeath nothing better to the rising generation than the heartfelt wish that his own rich experience of the goodness and mercy of God may be their own.

2. There are these two ways of looking at life—counting only the failures and disappointments and losses, or counting the hours which redeem the past and illumine the future.

(1) We all have our tragic days, evil days, the memory of which we lock tightly away in some secret place within. There is no denying that. Life can be cruel sometimes—this war seems to underline its cruelty—but even then, the dark days are nothing to the days of blessing. Think of the mercies that surround us every step of the way, the blessings of health and happiness, the love of friends and dear ones, the inspiration of our faith, the benediction of God's mercy—all these things far out-weigh the disadvantages of life.

¶ It is told of Dr Whyte of St George's, Edinburgh, how in the course of his visiting one afternoon, he went in to see a woman, old and poor. Throughout the twenty minutes of his stay she complained—complained about everybody and everything, while he sat silent. Then he rose to go, and, as he shook hands with her to bid her good-bye, with one of his rare smiles he said: 'And mind you, forget not all His benefits.'

(2) The dark shadow of war lies heavily upon our world; the sins of hatred and cruelty are spoiling our vaunted civilization; the spirit of fear stalks in every land. True, but again only part of the picture. As we go forth into a New Year we can look back along the road we have traversed and recall how often God has redeemed us from evil. The world was no better—indeed, it was infinitely worse—when Jesus came as the Child of Bethlehem over nineteen hundred years ago. And there is something in the Advent promise, and the prospect of the New Year which bids us hope that there is goodness and love, peace and goodwill, behind the darkness, the evil, and the hatred of our time; that God is coming to His world every day, seeking to lead us out into the dawn. And when the end of this dark road, that we are travelling now, comes for us, we, too, shall look back and say:

'God was with us, redeeming us all along the way.'

3. Perhaps the mistake that many of us make is just the mistake that Jacob made when he uttered the words, 'Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.' Jacob left God out of the situation; His name is never mentioned. It is all Jacob. He speaks of 'the days of the years of my pilgrimage,' 'the days of the years of my life,' and so on, without a syllable about anything except the purely earthly view of life. Of course, when you shut out God, the past is all dark enough, grey and dismal, like the landscape on some cloudy day, where the woods stand black, and the rivers creep melancholy through colourless fields, and the sky is grey and formless above. Let the sun come out, and the river flashes into a golden mirror, and the woods are alive with lights and shadows, and the sky stretches a blue pavilion above them, and all the birds sing. Let God into your life, and its whole complexion and characteristics change. The man who sits full of self-pity and complaints when he has shut out the thought of a Divine presence, finds that everything alters when he brings that in.

And if the world leaves God out, its life will be tragic, and the days and years shadowed with evil. But if God is with us the dawn will break, hope will inspire us, peace will again return to the ways of men—the sunshine of His presence will stream down upon us, lighting up the path.

¶ Evangeline Booth returned to the United States, where she had been Commander of the Salvation Army, in November, 1937, about three years after she had been elected General of the organization which her father founded. During the period she had been away she had travelled extensively. Asked by an interviewer, 'What is amiss with the world?' she quickly answered: 'There is just one thing wrong with the world and it is this: The world is trying to get along without God—and it can't be done.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> W. J. Hart.

## Rachel

Gen. xlviii. 7.—‘And as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come unto Ephrath : and I buried her there in the way of Ephrath ; the same is Beth-lehem.’

JACOB, feeble and spent, is lying in the quiet, tranquil passiveness of old age, with bygone things passing like dreams before the inner eye of the spirit—in that mood when one hardly knows where the imagined begins or the real ends. He is told that his son Joseph is coming, and he strengthens himself for an effort. Joseph enters, and, in a strain of high solemnity, Jacob speaks of the promise made long before on the stone-strewn hills of Bethel, and its fulfilment ; but even so he seems to wander in his thought, the recollection of his Rachel comes over him, and he cannot forbear to speak of her : ‘And as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan, in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come unto Ephrath : and I buried her there in the way of Ephrath ; the same is Beth-lehem.’<sup>1</sup>

How particularly he remembers it all ! How every detail is burned into his memory—the exact spot where it happened, and all the circumstances ! ‘Rachel died by me’—the Hebrew is ‘on me’ : that is, ‘leaning on me’ : she was leaning upon his breast when she died ; she was leaning upon his heart ! ‘In the way, when there was but a little way to come unto Ephrath : and I buried her there, in the way of Ephrath’—the race with death, he remembered it well, and how death won it ; how it was by the wayside that she died, before they could bring her to a place of rest and shelter ; and how he had had to leave the grave behind him, and push on upon his way. It is a grief which all the years have never quenched. He is an old man now, and he has passed through much since : it all happened many years ago ; but the memory of his first love is ever green.

1. From the moment Jacob lifted up his eyes and saw the young shepherdess coming towards the well, to the day of his death, the magic spell of Rachel was upon him. On his side, at least, it was a case of love at first sight, all the more strange and wonderful that we can find

<sup>1</sup> A. C. Benson, *The Thread of Gold*, 144.

little in Rachel's own character to account for it, little that is worthy of this deep and tender and abiding affection that had its birth in this romantic fashion. One thinks of Dante's words in his first meeting with the young Beatrice at a May feast : ‘From that moment Love became my Lord and King.’

Henceforth the names of Jacob and Rachel are linked together. At first the course of their love runs smooth, and nothing in Jacob's after-life should blind us to the idyllic beauty of this earlier time. Whatever his faults might be, he had at least lived a clean and wholesome life. He had a pure heart to offer the maiden whom he loved, and the years in which he wooed her were the golden time of his life. The essence of a hundred love-tales is contained in the simple words, ‘And Jacob served seven years for Rachel ; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.’

¶ ‘Love is a great thing, a blessing very good, the only thing which makes all burdens light, bearing evenly what is uneven, carrying a weight without feeling it, turning all bitterness into a sweet savour. It makes light of toil, would do more than it can, and pleads no impossibility, but is strong for anything.’<sup>1</sup>

¶ ‘The best life is that in which one does and bears everything because of some great and strong feeling, so that this and that in one's circumstances does not signify.’<sup>2</sup> As Ferdinand, carrying his logs, exclaims :

This my mean task

Would be as heavy to me as odious ; but  
The mistress which I serve quickens what's  
dead

And makes my labours pleasures.<sup>3</sup>

2. But the idyll of pure love ends in an act of treachery. Laban and Leah play the part of conspirators against Jacob and Rachel. Jacob finds himself drawn, first by a cunning conspiracy, and then by his own too easy consent, into a marriage with two sisters. This unhappy relationship afterwards became repellent to the Hebrews. ‘Thou shalt not,’ said their lawgiver, ‘take a woman to her sister, to be a rival to her, beside the other in her lifetime.’ The Bible tells its story faithfully and without comment,

<sup>1</sup> Thomas à Kempis.

<sup>2</sup> George Eliot.

<sup>3</sup> *The Tempest*.



but it is not difficult to see the envies and jealousies that crept into the home, and the humiliations and degradations that followed as a matter of course.

Rachel and Leah might be happy enough together as sisters, but not as the wives of one husband. No man ever gave his heart to two women. Jacob's marriage with Leah was, and could not but be, loveless. One wife was much loved and the other unloved; the unloved was a mother, and the much loved childless; and other elements made the situation still more complicated. 'Wherever there is polygamy women in general show themselves addicted to the petty forms of vanity, jealousy, spitefulness, and ambition.'<sup>1</sup>

At last, however, something like peace and harmony came into Jacob's home, for Rachel bore him a son, and what Jacob could not do the little child did—reconciled the sisters to each other. And so when Jacob at last resolves to return to his own home he takes counsel with Rachel and Leah together, and they readily agreed to accompany their husband southward to Canaan.

And this is what happened. Rachel, without the knowledge of her husband or any one else, carried away with her those teraphim or small images in human form, a kind of household gods, worshipped as givers of earthly prosperity and consulted as oracles. This incident sheds additional light on the character of Rachel. There is no doubt that she thought, to use a common phrase, that these teraphim would bring her luck; perhaps she thought she could only worship God by means of such images. But what are we to say of the theft? and what are we to say of the deception that followed the theft? She must have known the value placed by her father on these teraphim; it was this mainly that brought Laban in pursuit of Jacob and of his daughters, Rachel and Leah, that he might recover his household gods. It would almost make her out not only selfish but heartless: certainly it proved that conscience did not play a large part in her religious life, for both the theft and the fraud were connected with religion.

3. And now we come to the end of the story. And here one shrinks from criticism. She called her first-born Joseph because God had taken

away her reproach and given hope of adding yet further to the seed of Israel. 'Give me children,' she had cried, 'or else I die,' and now the answer to her own prayer brings death. The nurse that stood by the couch tried to speak words of hope and encouragement, 'Fear not for now thou shalt have another son'; but the dying mother refused to be comforted, and, turning to the little baby boy, she whispered with her dying breath, 'Call him Benoni, son of my pain, son of my anguish.'

One shrinks from criticism; but is there not here something characteristic? a trace of that selfishness, shall we say, that runs through Rachel's life? In those days when every name had a meaning was it quite fair to the child or to the husband to carry this name through life? Jacob himself felt it was not fair, and he loved Rachel with a deep, strong love: it was true, pathetically true, that the child was the son of her sorrow, but this should not be the only aspect of this great trial ever before their minds; Rachel was taken but the child was left, and Jacob changed the name from Benoni to Benjamin, son of my right hand.

4. There are three things that go far to redeem the character of Rachel from all that is petty and trivial and that almost suggest the presence of virtues that are not brought out in the record of Scripture. These are: first, that she inspired a great love. From that day at the well in the field to the day of her death at Ephrath, near to Bethlehem, Rachel occupied the throne in Jacob's heart. It comes out in many little ways in his treatment of Rachel and in the mother-love lavished upon their children, Joseph and Benjamin, after she was taken. One instinctively feels that mere beauty of face and form could never have kept alive all those years the steady flame of a strong, enduring affection.

The second thing is that she was the mother of the child Joseph, one of the highest and most beautiful types of saintly character in the whole of Scripture biography. And heredity counts for something.

And last of all—and this has perhaps touched the great human heart of the world more than anything else—she is the proto-martyr of motherhood—the first of that great multitude who have paid this high price for the gift of a new life to the world.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lecky.

<sup>1</sup> T. E. Miller, *Portraits of Women of the Bible*, 51.

¶ This beautiful, short-lived woman became to the Hebrews the type of suffering motherhood—their *mater dolorosa*, mother of sorrows. Life is a web of thin-spun texture, easily rent. Death sometimes takes the mother from the child, sometimes the child from the mother. In either case it is the mother who suffers. ‘Rachel weeping for her children’ became a proverb in Israel. Jeremiah, most tender-hearted of prophets, heard her voice long after in Ramah, as if her spirit still haunted the place; and when the birth of Jesus was followed by the massacre of the innocents at Bethlehem, it was Rachel’s cry of anguish that was once more heard on the hills of Ephrath. The pillar of Rachel’s grave, set up by Jacob, became the monument of suffering motherhood, to which many another pilgrim, from whom God had taken away the desire of his eyes, turned aside to meditate on an irremediable sorrow with an unchangeable love.

Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;  
O Death in Life, the days that are no more.<sup>1</sup>

### Instability

Gen. xlix. 3, 4.—‘Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.’

1. THERE are two scenes in the life of Reuben which compel attention, the one by its pathos, the other by its tragedy. Reuben is the first-born child of Jacob, and listen to the language in which his father describes him—‘The excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power.’ Who of us has ever been able to imagine or comprehend the pride and joy with which our parents watched our growth, and anticipated the course of life for us? Sometimes we catch some faint glimpse of what this meant, and we confess, with a remorseful pang, how often our follies must have brought anxious hours and sleepless nights to our parents, and how little we appreciated the wistful hope and fear with which they regarded us. There is nothing finer or more touching than this relation of parent and child. We feel the thrill of the parental

passion in these words of the dying Jacob, and we catch the vision of the past. We see Reuben, the firstborn child of prayer and infinite hope, growing up in manly dignity, watched with affectionate pride, standing in the sunlight of this great dawn of society with vast potentialities in him, and it is a perfect picture of perfect youth. There are eyes that have seen in us the same vision. Every father sees in his child an apocalypse of hope, and little as he may seem to answer to the words, the child is evermore to him excellent in dignity and excellent in power.

That is the pathetic and beautiful aspect of Reuben’s life; but it has also a tragic aspect. Parents are not wholly blind even in their love, and doubtless the eyes of Jacob discerned early in his firstborn the seeds of dangerous tendencies. Buoyancy, and vivacity, and vigour he had, but there were also other significant elements—a weakness of the will, a lack of firm and resolute principle. Were there not such elements in Jacob himself? Had it not taken all the discipline of a long life to overcome them, and to weld the perilous disturbing fluids of inconstancy into the hard concrete of honourable character? The chain is no stronger than its weakest link, and this flexibility of principle was the weak link in Reuben’s character.

2. What are the elements of Reuben’s character which bring this old story into touch with our modern life?

(1) First of all, he was a youth of impulse, and of this the word used gives a striking indication. Literally it is, *Bubbling up or bubbling over like water, thou shalt not excel*. His nature was full of effervescence—the bright bubbling up of vivid life, of fancies, hopes, purposes, effervescent nobleness, effervescent baseness, a sparkling water, quick to rise, and as quick to fall again. When the hour for noble action strikes, he is ready; his impulse bubbles up quick and strong, and he will not let his brother die: but also when the hour is dark and silent, and he is alone with a powerful seduction of the senses, the base impulse masters him. There are many whose stability is really inertia; neither for good nor evil will they ever be active. But those who at once inspire both hope and dread are the youths of quick and vivid impulse. They thrill easily—as easily to evil as to good. They can say and do generous

<sup>1</sup> J. Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, 84.



things, but their very lightness of temperament makes them a prey to sordid temptations.

It is true, as Browning has put it, that one flash of noble impulse may seem, when we sign the *finis* on the last page of life, the best thing our life has known or done.

While just this or that poor impulse,  
Which for once had play unstified,  
Seems the sole work of a life-time  
That away the rest have trifled.

And why is it worth so much? Because it was a noble impulse, and because it was applied nobly. But for us the lesson lies in a different direction: it is the lesson of the entire futility of impulse *in itself* to make life noble, and the likelihood of mere impulsiveness betraying men, who have no more solid qualities in their moral outfit. Reuben had fine impulses, but they did not prevent his fall into the mire of horrible uncleanness. Peter had the quickest and most generous impulse when he said, 'I will go with thee to prison and to death,' but it did not prevent him denying Christ with oaths and curses. The great business of life is not to feel finely, but to do finely; and woe be to him who puts fine feeling in the place of fine action. In this bright unstable Reuben there was an immense fund of feeling, and little more. He feels nobly about Joseph, but, on that fatal day beneath the towers of Edar, he fell ignobly too; and in the presence of his clamorous brothers he is as little capable of rescuing Joseph as he was capable, in the presence of that great temptation at Edar, to resist the promptings of the flesh. And thus it was said of him, surely more in sorrow than in anger, with infinite mournfulness over infinite failure: 'Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.'

¶ Peter the Great once said in the penitent mood which followed one of his frenzies of lawless rage, 'I can reform my people, I cannot reform myself.'

(2) But there is a second element in Reuben's story which is suggested by the words which the dying Jacob used. The water that bubbles up, variable and intermittent, is suggestive of the versatility of impulse; but the word unstable opens a further range of thought. Unstable as water—the phrase is so exquisitely accurate, that it has become proverbial. Water—what can you make of it, or do with it? You can

build nothing out of water. It is not alike two days together—nor two hours: impermanent, unresting, variable—what emblem is there that so impresses on the mind the fact of instability as water? And that was Reuben's case. He was not only a youth of impulse, but his impulses were variable. He followed nothing to an end. He wished to excel, as all men do who are not abject imbeciles; but his wishes came by fits and starts, and there was no continuity of purpose. And it was because Jacob had seen this fickleness of purpose, and marked this variableness of mood, that he said of him—'Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.'

Whatever is uncertain in the conduct of life, this is sure: nothing of goodness or of wisdom can be won without effort, and that not the effort of an hour, but of a lifetime: effort that is never relaxed, never variable, never intermittent; and which, by virtue of its great endurance, in the end wins the great reward. Not alone in spiritual things, but of all the tasks in life it may be said, 'Blessed is he that endureth to the end, for he shall be saved.'

3. Is there any cure for instability? That there is we see from our Lord's treatment of Peter in the Gospels. Who is the Reuben of the New Testament? Undoubtedly it is Simon, the son of Jonas, the head of the apostolic band. Strange that a Reuben should become the leader of the Apostles! Yet it was so. For as we analyse the character of that impulsive man, we see it is of the very same temperament as Reuben's. In the man who at one hour said, 'Though all be offended in thee, yet will not I,' and in the next was afraid of the accusations of a servant girl and began 'to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man'; in the disciple who in the night-storm said, 'Lord, bid me come to thee on the water,' and in the next moment cried, 'Lord, save me, I perish'; in the man who at Caesarea opened the door of the Church to the Gentiles and at Antioch withdrew himself from Paul, fearing them of the Circumcision, we have the very type of the unstable man, who does not excel.

But we know how differently it turned out with Peter. 'Thy name shall be called Peter,' said Jesus to him when he first became a disciple. Simon a Rock! Surely nothing could be more unlikely. As well call a rock out of the sand which tosses and swirls on a stormy shore

and 'never continues in one way.' Yet we know it was so under our Lord's wise treatment. The inconstant Simon developed into the courageous Peter, the man of lion-hearted testimony on the Day of Pentecost, the rock on which the Early Church was built.

It was love and trust that did it. The Lord trusted Peter. He believed in him from the first. He called him a man of rock when he was only a man of water. And then He bound him to Himself by love. He drew him with the cords of love, and on the Cross tightened these cords so firmly around his unstable soul that the man was changed, solidified as water is into marble when the hand of frost is laid upon it.

¶ When I was a minister in Aberdeen I was taken one day by the harbour engineer to see a new swing-bridge which had been built over one of the waterways of the docks. What struck me most was the gentle, easy way it glided out and in at the pressure of an electric button. 'What does it move on so easily?' I said. 'It seems to turn on a socket of velvet.' 'It turns on a socket of *water*,' he replied. 'Water!' I said. 'Surely water could never hold up a bridge like that,' 'Yes, water,' he said, 'not water as you know it; but water compressed in a mighty cylinder with such a pressure as you can hardly imagine. That is at once the strongest and the easiest socket on which any bridge can turn.'<sup>1</sup>

### Judah's Character

Gen. xlix. 8.—'Judah, thee shall thy brethren praise:  
Thy hand shall be on the neck of thine  
enemies;  
Thy father's sons shall bow down before  
thee' (R.V.).

THE name of Joseph, first among the sons of Jacob, at the beginning of their nation, grows pale as history advances, before the name of Judah. Even the great word Israel dies before it. It is the Jews, the men of Judah, that fill the records of the world. The song of Jacob and the blessing of his sons, at whatever date inserted in the Book of Genesis, contain that which was then thought of the pre-eminence of Judah—'Thee shall thy brethren praise. He stooped down, he couched as a lion; who shall stir him up?' Only the king of beasts could be his fitting symbol.

<sup>1</sup> W. M. Mackay.

1. It was not long before the tribe of Judah rose into leadership. Of all who left Egypt, we are told it was the most numerous. To it in the wilderness, when the Twelve Tribes were divided into four camps, was given the eastern position towards the rising sun, and it led the march. The first romantic story of the land of Canaan belongs to its history. Caleb, the friend of Joshua, the only one with Joshua who, the story says, survived the wilderness, was the first who made the great tribe famous; and he chose Hebron and its valley for his conquest. The choice itself was full of meaning; for in Hebron lay the only spot which in the whole land the Jews could claim as theirs from the beginning, the little field of Machpelah that Abraham bought, where he and Isaac and Jacob lay at rest. The most sacred place in the hearts of Israel was claimed and won by hard fighting by the tribe of Judah.

In the midst of this land arose afterwards the greatest genius and king that Israel had seen, David of Bethlehem, the lion of the tribe. Poet, musician, freebooter, warrior, ruler, he wrought the tribes into one nation. He took Jerusalem and gave the kingdom a capital city within the bounds of his own tribe. He centred there religion and law. Beneath his sway captive nations bent, and Jehovah became the Lord of Hosts; and on the day when in proud procession up the heights of Zion the hymn was sung, 'Lift up your heads, oh, ye gates, that the King of Glory may come in,' the words, 'Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise,' received their highest historical meaning. Then came the division of the kingdom after Solomon's death; and, in a few generations, the fall of Samaria before Assyria left Judah alone. Into it gathered the whole of the national spirit, and the little people stood firm against their mighty neighbours. The day of misfortune came, and Judah fell before Babylon, but not for long. The persistent force of the nation, that persistency which was Jacob's, and which above all else marks the Jew, made its way to restoration, and when the captives returned to Jerusalem, all the people of their race became Jews, men of Judah; and Jerusalem, to all the scattered Jews, the sacred centre of the earth. At last, of David's line, arose a greater still. The Master of men came of the stock of Judah, and as His kingdom was symbolized in the giving to Him of the ancient name—the Lion



of the tribe of Judah—so was the meekness and love which made His kingship sure, as well as the source whence He derived it, symbolized in His other name—the Lamb of God.

2. Looking back, then, on the great history of this tribe, we become interested in him who was its founder. What sort of man does the Book of Genesis represent him to be? Is there anything in the few touches we have of him that can account for the pre-eminence of his tribe?

(1) The first scene in which we meet him is marked with the fierce passions of an early time. The brothers have met for the mid-day meal at Dothan. They lift their eyes, and see Joseph drawing near across the fields, and hate and scorn, envy and jealousy ring in the sentence: 'Behold, this dreamer cometh! Come, now, let us slay him and cast him into a pit, and we shall see what will become of his dreams.' Thus the sin of hatred cherished in thought breaks out, on opportunity given, into the sudden act of murder, and we learn that though sins of thought are not so bad as sins of act, for they can still be repented of, yet, to nurse a sin in thought is to make it easy to commit in act.

Judah had hated like the rest, but he kept his head. Passion touched him for a short period, but prudence had its way after passion. When the company of Ishmaelites passed by, he seized his opportunity. He foresaw the wild torment of conscience if he and they slew their brother. 'His blood would cry out of the ground in which they should conceal it.' Therefore, coolly, quietly, he provided against the dreadful work of conscience in the future. 'Our end will be reached as easily without shedding our brother's blood. Sell him to this caravan; we shall be rid of him and his dreams, and be quiet-hearted. What profit is it if we slay our brother and conceal his blood?' And his brethren were content.

At the very moment of act while the deed is but half done, while the full sin is not committed, we may retreat; but the story tells us that we cannot put things back as they were before. The worst may not be done, but if we do not murder Joseph, we must sell him for a slave. Judah retreated, but he could not retreat altogether. Nor did he succeed in saving his conscience—as we often try to do in other things—by going only half-way to sin. 'His

blood shall not be mine,' said Judah, 'I will not murder.' And as long as hatred lasted, no doubt that was enough to keep his conscience quiet. But, as hatred died in Joseph's absence, conscience came back, and Judah knew his guilt, and so did his brothers. How hard it bore upon them we may see by their fear and their speech when, years afterwards, misfortune fell upon them at Pharaoh's court. At once they referred their trouble to the vengeance of God. 'We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us. His blood is required of us.'

Judah may have saved Joseph for prudential reasons, but that covers only part of his action. In the light of after events in which he showed as much heart as prudence, his present deed has another aspect. One or two quick words confirm the view that he saved him out of kindness as well. His hatred was great, but, as he waited, other thoughts stole in. He thought of the young life, he remembered his father's love for the youth, he remembered he was a brother. We find behind the prudence which said, 'What profit,' the humanity which closed his speech with the words, 'He is our brother and our flesh.' There may not have been much humanity in him, but it was in his nature, and it grew.

(2) Let us look at Judah again as he appears at a later stage in the story, and in very different circumstances. The food that Jacob's sons had brought from Egypt was exhausted, and their father bade them go again. But Joseph had refused to see them without Benjamin, and Jacob would not part with the last of Rachel's sons. Reuben had pledged his two children to his father for the safety of Benjamin, but Jacob did not believe in Reuben. He was weak through long grief and age, and petulant: 'My son shall not go down with you; if mischief befall him by the way in which ye go, then shall ye bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. Why did ye tell the man ye had a brother?' Then Judah, the spokesman for the rest, stepped forward and met Jacob's useless weakness with a clear statement of the case. 'If thou wilt send our brother with us, we will go down and buy thee food, but if thou wilt not send him, we will not go, for the man solemnly protested to us, ye shall not see my face except your brother be with you.' And when Jacob

still hung back, he went on: 'Send the lad with me and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, we and thou and our little ones. Do you not see that all our lives are in question?' Then, with a touch of that impatience with vain objections and delay which those men have who see vividly the right thing to do, he adds: 'Except we had lingered, surely we had returned this second time.'

Now, such a character is often hard, and Judah had often been hard. Still, as before, the humanity in his character comes out. He feels with sorrow; and though he speaks sternly, he pities the old man's grief. 'I will be surety for Benjamin, and of my hand shalt thou require him; if I bring him not unto thee, let me bear the blame for ever.' It was no vain boast; he meant it thoroughly. And the old man felt his son's love and knew that he might trust him. Judah's strong character had made its way, and Jacob yields at once, as Judah's brethren did before, to the mastery and truth of his son: 'Take your brother and go.'

(3) The next, and almost the last scene in which we meet him, is equally characteristic. Joseph's cup is put in Benjamin's sack. The sons of Israel are pursued and accused of the theft. The cup is discovered, and Judah and his brethren return to Joseph's house. No man could be in a more difficult position now than Judah. The very child he had sworn to bring back is the guilty one, and Judah cannot deny Benjamin's guilt. And it was guilt against the greatest man in Egypt, in whose hand were not only their lives, but the lives of all they had left behind. Judah closed at once with the difficulty, and nothing can be more masterly, more quiet, more politic, than the way in which he did it. He confesses the guilt at once with his usual justice, and to shield Benjamin he binds himself and all his brethren together as responsible for the crime. 'What shall we say unto my lord, what shall we speak, or how shall we clear *ourselves*? God has found out the iniquity of thy servants; behold, we are my lord's servants, both we and he also with whom the cup is found.' 'God forbid,' replied Joseph, 'only he shall be my servant with whom is found my cup.' Then Judah, driven into the last corner, makes his beautiful and touching plea, almost the most beautiful thing in this Book of Genesis.

He begins by saying how terribly surprised

they are that such an act of ingratitude had so quickly followed the generosity of Joseph, but requests the privilege of pleading his cause. He tells Joseph of the pitiable state of their old father, in words which must have harrowed his very soul; of how the old man had once set his affections on a boy, of how that boy was dead and gone now these many years; and how God had given him another son, at the cost of the life of his beautiful mother, this Benjamin, and how the father had learned to forget the bitterness of the past in the society of this boy. Then Judah tells the affecting story of Jacob's parting with Benjamin, and of their pledges to bring him safely home. And now this terrible thing had happened. They dare not go back without the boy, else their father will die. Benjamin is young, foolish, and knew not the enormity of his crime. Make allowances for his inexperience and let him return: 'for thy servant became surety for the lad unto my father, saying, if I bring him not unto thee, then I shall bear the blame to my father forever. Now, therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren, for how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me? lest peradventure I see evil come upon my father.'<sup>1</sup>

¶ Luther says he would give anything if he could pray to God as Judah prayed to Joseph. True prayer is the spontaneous utterance of a deeply moved heart. Judah has a theme which makes him a perfect intercessor; he is pleading for a brother whom he loves, and for whose safety he has pledged his own honour. If our English literature contains anything that is worthy of being placed side by side with this Hebrew masterpiece, it is Jeanie Deans' intercession for the life of her sister Effie at the court of Queen Anne.

It is at that moment when, in intense realization of his father's sorrow, and in sympathy with it, Judah loved Jacob and Benjamin enough to say: 'I give myself to bondage or death, if only they may be happy,' that not only his sin against Joseph was blotted out from his conscience—he could not have felt its burden again—but also, that he reached nobleness—one whom even Joseph, his brother, should praise. The same passionate nature which we have seen break forth in hatred, in anger, in a half scorn of weakness, now broke out in a rush of self-

<sup>1</sup> H. E. Kirk, *A Man of Property*, 75.



sacrifice. There the true king of men appeared. He needed but that to fulfil his nature. The lion of Judah became at one with the spirit of the Lamb of God.

(4) We get one more hint of Judah's life. We are told that Jacob going down to Egypt sent Judah before him to meet Joseph. Benjamin is kept by the father's side, but the wise and just and tender man is sent to greet the great prince, and the well-beloved son. It was Jacob's forgiveness of the wrong of Judah. It was the expression of Jacob's gratitude to Judah and his trust in him. And when Joseph met Judah, he must have loved him. For if Judah had sold Joseph, he had offered his life for Benjamin. Of all the brothers he was the only one with whom Joseph could now be a close friend. Both were kingly men, each had won eminence over others, each knew the world, and both had proved their heart. They met and stood together, and around them the chariots and troops of Joseph; and the sight is worthy of the eye of history. For there, on the threshold of the land where their race was to grow into a great multitude, met in thought the two great Kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Ephraim, the leader and royal tribe of Israel, came of Joseph. In Judah lay all the great time of David and Solomon, and the later history of the Jews. It was a royal meeting. Men looked at both and wondered. The Egyptians stood round Joseph, and all thought him the greatest, and it was so then. Judah stood alone, but around him stands in the view of history all the greatest men of the Jewish race, all its greatest work and thought; and great as Joseph was then, Judah was yet greater.

### The Final Victory

Gen. xlix. 19.—'Gad, a troop shall overcome him; but he shall overcome at the last.'

'GAD,' says Jacob, as he looks round upon his sons and the turn of this son comes, 'what shall I say of Gad?' The name suggests his blessing, for the Hebrew word *gad* means *troop*; and in the text there is a triple play upon the word. 'Troops shall troop upon him, but he shall troop on them retreating.' 'Raiders shall raid him, but he shall raid upon them at last.' Something like that is the reading of it.

1. When Canaan was divided among the Twelve Tribes, Gad was given his portion on the east side of Jordan, along with Reuben and half the tribe of Manasseh. Gad occupied, roughly speaking, the stretch of country in what is now called Transjordan, stretching from the Sea of Galilee in the north to the Dead Sea in the south. It was a beautiful country, well wooded and watered, a country with not much arable land but with plenty of scope for flocks and herds such as Gad desired to rear. In many ways, therefore, it was an admirable inheritance.

But there was one grave disadvantage attendant on Gad's position. On the eastern side it faced the open desert, and there was no way by which Gad could bar the door against the troops of Arab raiders that from time to time swept down upon him. He was cut off, moreover, by the Jordan from the help of the stronger tribes that lived on the other side, and his immediate neighbours, Reuben and the half tribe of Manasseh, had as much as they could do to look after themselves.

Gad was thus dependent entirely upon his own resources. Again and again the enemy came down upon him, and always in the first rush Gad was forced to take to the hills. He saw his flocks and herds laid hold of by the spoiler; he saw his homes and steadings go up in flames to the sky; his hard-earned labour was consumed by the enemy before his eyes. But amid it all Gad remained courageous. He had learned his lesson from Jacob, and in the darkest hour he refused to despair.

¶ Gad was totally unlike that unfortunate monarch, the Emperor Francis of Austria, whose lot it was to be crushed again and again by Napoleon. 'After a great defeat,' said his chief minister, 'he will get himself into the dust and will calmly commend us all to God'—instead, that is, of doing something to retrieve his fortunes.

Gad did not forget in his need to ask the help of God, but he also resolved to plan and think and fight his way back to ultimate victory. Even as he fled, Gad was wondering when and where he could most effectively deliver the counter-stroke. In his fastnesses among the hills he watched and waited, and waited and watched. By and by the enemy, elated with success, settled down to enjoy the fruits of his victory, and then it was that Gad began to stir. The fiery cross went up and down among the

hills; the disinherited Gadites mustered their ranks, and launched their attack. Raiding or retreating, this gallant tribe never gave in, and at the last they overcame.

¶ It was said of the Romans—'Sometimes defeated in battle, but never beaten in war.' It is true to our own experience. There has been many a battle in which our armies have had the worst of it. There have been reverses and withdrawals and surrenders; but through all the changing story of what was happening here and there over the vast arena, there has been one steady movement. The conflict was moving to its inevitable end; and 'at the last' it was settled beyond a doubt.

2. No fact is more apparent than this—that the law of life is a law of struggle. Every step is one of conflict; and just to live, to survive, is a victory. Is it not our latest lesson—that all the strength and beauty are wrought out by incessant strife, so purchased, so won by conflict? Life works out its meaning and reaches its results by a continual battle. All that is good and worthy in life must be won in struggle and achievement.

God sets us in the place where we must fight—in the border-country, open to the desert and its wild tribes. So He honours us with our opportunity. Yet He never makes life so hard for us that we cannot be victorious, never so hard that we may not find victory at the end of it. 'He shall overcome at the last.' Perhaps the lesson of the text is in this word—'at the last.' Nothing is settled till the end comes. If we may say it, nothing is final but the end. Take the fight to the finish; the last result is the true result.

Is there anything more heartening than the thought of life's second chance? We are always getting new chances to fight again and fight better. God does not put us to the proof of a single deed, telling us that if we miss this we are lost. If we had but one chance in life, and the first defeat were final, it would fare badly with most of us.

Often we say that opportunities never come twice to us; the lost chance never comes again. It is true, but it is not the whole truth. That same chance does not return, but another comes. No single opportunity comes twice, but other opportunities come. Though the least of life be left, there is yet another chance. A man

may have a sore battle to fight, and he may be defeated, and know the bitterness and shame of falling again. Yet he may rise and stand where once he fell. He may take the second chance when the first is lost for ever.

¶ It was a saying of Confucius—'Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.' Robert Louis Stevenson tells us that, 'Our business in this world is not to succeed, but to continue to fail, in good spirits.' That is bold teaching, and only safe for the strenuous. But his point is that we should never consent to fail. He tells the story of a friend: 'The tale of this great failure is, to those who remained true to him, the tale of a success. In his youth he took thought for no one but himself; when he came ashore again, his whole armada lost, he seemed to think of none but others. . . . He had gone to ruin with a kind of kingly *abandon*, like one who condescended; but once ruined, with the lights all out, he fought as for a kingdom.'

3. It is easy to speak of perseverance. But there is only one thing that enables us to persevere, and that is a religious hopefulness, a hope that rests on faith in God. When the battle is going against us, if we have trust in God, we may find heart to try again. If our life, too, has been blessed by our Father, then we go forth to our battle like the men of Gad, this the banner of our tribe and kindred—'He shall overcome at the last.'

It should help us in all our varied conflict—in our business with its reverses, in our families with their cares, in our Christian life with its difficulties. It should sustain us against our temptations, in mending our habits, against the sin that besets us—when we sink again before its attack, and feel that we are worse than ever and it is of no use trying again. Against doubt and misfortune and sorrow—we are not to be crushed beneath it.

It is a word that comes to us in our Christian experience. Most people find themselves exposed to the risk of being forced back from the open and decided Christian positions, from the places of attainment and of action which Christ expects us to hold. It would be idle to imagine that any life is able to stand firm continually. Most of us who have tried the Christian life know how often we have failed. But this is true—that if a man has once chosen Christ and



the good life of the Kingdom, 'he shall overcome at the last.' His heart is true; and he will not surrender in spite of his frequent failures and defeats. He falls to rise—is baffled to fight better. Let us be true to our faith, our Leader, and our cause; and it will yet be well with us. We shall overcome 'at the last.'

This do I glory in beneath the sun;  
That men have lived brave lives in evil times,  
Have kept glad-hearted under stress of pain,  
Have fought against all odds, and not despaired,  
Have fallen and died exulting. So may I  
Keep an undaunted spirit all my days,  
Lose not the larger view, hold fast the joy  
And with high courage come unto my grave.<sup>1</sup>

### A Fruitful Life

Gen. xlix. 22.—'Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall.'

JACOB'S wise old eyes, travelling round the circle of his sons, were shadowed with disappointment as he looked at this one and that, but when they rested on Joseph his eyes lit with love and pride and hope. A true son of the East, he thought in pictures, and there flashed in his mind's eye, as he looked at Joseph, the picture of a strong and fruitful tree whose beauty and abundance were drawn from a hidden well that fed its roots with living water. That is like Joseph, my son, he thought, and his thoughts broke into these words, 'Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall.'

1. *A fruitful bough.* When he described him in this way, was he remembering how his brilliant son had got on down in Egypt? Of course Jacob rejoiced in Joseph's rise to power and wealth as any father would. But dying men, about to leave the world as naked as they entered it, don't, as a rule, put material success first in their scale of values. What mattered more to the dying Jacob than his son's outward success was the spirit that was in him, the kind of man he had become. He had grown into strength and nobility of manhood far beyond

any of his brethren. 'He had walked with crowds,' in Kipling's words, 'and kept his virtue. And talked with Kings, nor lost the common touch.' As our Lord Jesus would put it, he had won his soul, in good and bad fortune alike, keeping his heart clean and courageous. He had mastered his circumstances, because first of all he had mastered the defects of his own nature and temperament.

And that is success as a dying man like Jacob sees it, even though, like Jacob, he has no faith in a life to come. That is success as God sees it—at least the God in whom Christians believe. There are other so-called gods worshipped in the world to-day who are invoked to bless what is just damnable in the sight of that God in whom we believe. Have you noticed that men can claim the approval of some vague god for things they do, for which they would never dare to claim the approval of Jesus Christ? But to the Christian there is but one living and true God with whom we have to do, and He has spoken out His mind and heart and will to us in Christ His Son. If you hold to that faith too, then you will agree that at the end of our day, what we are will count, in God's sight, an infinite deal more than what we own. His test of success will be the kind of spirit that is in us. There is a man we hear of in the Gospels who was blind to that. He was a farmer who had prospered so that his barns were too small to hold his fruits. Success like that and the good time he would have when it came had been the one end and object of his life. Our Lord wrote that man's epitaph in these two words—'Thou fool.' It is a fool's bargain, Jesus said, to win the whole world if any part of the price is conscience or love or truth or justice.

¶ Jeremy Taylor has a tremendous phrase about those who are 'going back in the accounts of eternity.' It is possible to go forward in the accounts of this world—in the daily ledger, in the monthly balance at the bank, in the investments which are the modern equivalent of barns; and yet to be going back all the time in the accounts of eternity, because, as the years pass and character hardens and the world absorbs and fascinates us, there may be less love in the life, and less service. If that be so, then even the going forward in this world's accounts may be paid for at too great a price.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Edith Colby Banfield.

<sup>1</sup> J. M. E. Ross.

It is another kind of success that the God who made us bids us aim at most of all. He has planted us here to grow, with His help, as near as we can to being Christlike. That is the meaning in the mysteries of this queer and sometimes terribly difficult life of ours. But we are not likely to believe that, unless there is such a well at the roots of our life as that from which Joseph drew his purity and strength.

2. Let us think of that well. It is a strange thing how among the children of the same parents one sometimes turns out to be a far finer kind of person than the others. But if Joseph was a finer man than his brothers, the reason is not far to seek. He had what they had not, a living faith in the living God. Perhaps, like his father before him, that faith did not become alive in Joseph until he had left his home behind him. It was in the wilderness, you remember (on his first night away from home), when he had run away from the vengeance of Esau, that Jacob saw the angels. And it was down in Egypt, in its prisons and its slavery, that Joseph found that there is a God who does respond to a man's trust, and helps him through. Again and again the story says that the Lord was with him. And he cultivated his sense of that strong and holy Presence until it governed all he did. When temptation came through Potiphar's wife, 'How can I do this great wickedness,' he said, 'and sin against God?' Trust in God kept his courage up and his heart pure. The well in which his life was rooted was his friendship with God.

A community of young men, dedicated to the service of Christ, settled in the island of Iona a few years ago and began to build living quarters for themselves in the grounds of the old Cathedral. Men cannot live or build without a plentiful supply of fresh water—that was lacking. So they brought engineers to bore for water, and in two places they found it, but not nearly enough. And then under the pressure of this urgent problem, they tried the old well near the Cathedral door, that the monks of Iona had used long centuries ago. They bored down through the accumulation of stones and rubbish that seemed to have choked it, and up the fresh, cool water came, more than enough for all their needs.

'If any man thirst, let him come unto me

and drink.' That is a promise to satisfy, not our desires, but those deep needs we share with all men and women. To mention two of them. There is the need to come to terms with our past. That past of ours is not dead, but lives on in memories that have power to depress us with a sense of defeat and sap our confidence and hope. Jesus Christ alone can break that power and roll that cloud away. He says to us, 'Be of good cheer. Your sins are forgiven. I died to give you the assurance that God cares for you, forgives you, believes in you, just as you are and here and now.'

¶ Stephen Graham tells of a Russian revolutionary who before his execution turned to the four points of the compass, saying, 'Forgive me, North! Forgive me, South! Forgive me, East! Forgive me, West!'—then marched to his doom. There is something ultimate in that need: every other necessity is more or less upon the surface: that one belongs to the very roots of our being.

Our other need is the need of power to become the man or woman that in our best moments we want to be, the need of more courage, the need of desire to break some deplorable habit. The old monks in Iona found all that in Christ centuries ago. It is still as true as ever, that to as many as receive Him, Christ gives power to become like Himself, like Himself in His purity and poise, in His love and joy and peace.

3. And now for a last brief glance at Joseph. His branch, said Jacob, ran over the wall—he had been shelter and blessing, had been fertile for good in other lives. Every one who had to do with him was the better of it. The biggest thing he did, in Jacob's eyes, was to keep alive in the world a living faith in the true God. There was nothing in the other brothers to keep Israel from relapsing into barbarism. But the life and memory of Joseph would do that.

The western world looks as if it might go pagan and relapse into barbarism once again, and there is paganism enough in this land without looking for it elsewhere. There is just a desperate need of Josephs to-day to keep the flag of faith flying. It needs the witness of a life that has the marks of Christ upon it to do that. Are we making it easier for others to believe in Him? All of us have a responsibility here, for there is not one of us but has some



influence in the circles where we move. To all of us our Lord says, most earnestly, most tenderly, 'Abide in me and you too will bring forth much fruit and my joy and peace will be in you.'

¶ One of the manly saints of modern times was Bishop Francis Paget. In his biography the historian of it quotes a letter written to his son Bernard. Francis Paget advises his student son to read the Gospel of St John continually. 'And when you have read it I should like you to watch someone like your mother, and see the strength and purity and gentleness and brightness that Christ works in a life simply set towards Him.'<sup>1</sup>

### A Father's Prayer

Gen. xlix. 22-25.—'A tree of fruit is Joseph, a fruit-tree by a well, the branches covering the walls. Archers bitterly assail him, shoot at him savagely, but his own bow remains steady, and he nimbly plies his arms; Jacob's Mighty One upholds him, Israel's Strength sustains him—ay, your father's God who aids you' (Moffatt).

1. JOSEPH was the favourite son, and we may be sure that into the inheritance sketched out for him there was crowded all an old man's fondness. It is as if the aged patriarch—this old, shrewd man who had seen all that there is to see, and travelled the whole round of human experience—took this many-sided life of ours into his thin and shaking hands, and felt it over, and turned it round and round, seeking the very best it has to offer for the man that he loved most. And when at last he makes his choice, it reveals an unexpected bigness of character in a somewhat mean and shabby soul.

'I don't ask,' he says, 'that the lad should have a soft and sheltered lot, full of success and comfort. I ask for no immunity from the fierce buffeting of Fate, no shielding of him from the dangers and the wounds of the high places in the field. Let him be exercised with difficulties; let him have his whole fair share of trouble to face and pain to bear! For these things should endow his soul with grit and hardihood, and otherwise it might grow soft and flabby and degenerate. The ordering of things I leave to Thee, claim for him only this—Grant him a brave heart that can face life at its darkest unafraid, and such a sense of God, his father's

<sup>1</sup> A. MacLean, *The Quiet Heart*, 163.

God, continually beside him, too near to be missed, too certain to be doubted, as must bring him through with gallantry and steady eyes. And, for the rest, Thy will for him be done.' 'The archers bitterly assail him, shooting at him savagely.' What matter, 'if his own bow remains steady, if he nimbly plies his arms, if Jacob's Mighty One upholds him, if Israel's Strength sustains him,' if he himself plays the man, and is upheld by God?

I don't want to get off, cries Browning (he was thinking of death), don't want to have my eyes bandaged, and creep past; don't want to be spared anything. Give me the whole of a man's lot, however sore. I don't want to get off, says Paul (he was thinking of life, which he felt to be a far more dangerous affair), let them all come—principalities and powers, the present hardships, the unknown that is lurking in the future waiting to stab as we stroll past—let them all come, and in Christ we will face them, aye, and be the better for them. I don't want to get off, says Mr Masefield (he was thinking of his soul), watching a man ploughing, and the red earth being torn apart how cruelly by the hard, gleaming share. But if Christ holds the shafts, let my soul also be so ploughed—yes, deeper, deeper still! For so, please God, my bare life may in time be covered over with the rich gold of that harvest of righteousness which Christ dares to promise even to me. It is the glory of their constant weather that breeds that languor in the southern races, declares Kingsley, and our own bitter days that keep us energetic. And, with his face blue with cold and his whole body shivering under the sharp north-easter, he still greets it joyously. 'Blow, thou wind of God!' I don't want my boy to have too soft a lot, prayed Jacob. Let the archers shoot at him and let him have to struggle through!

¶ 'What,' asks one, 'gave us Cromwell and Lincoln, Livingstone and Stanley, General Booth and Jerry Macauley? Civil wars and dark continents and city slums—hard places every one of them! The soft, sunny corners where lazy people doze in placid comfort never produce such men.'<sup>1</sup>

2. Evidently this is a man who has won to a different conception of life from ours, who has another ideal for it, another reading of what it is for. We think of it as ours, as given us to

<sup>1</sup> W. H. Butler, *The Reality of Things Unseen*, 37.

enable us to push our fortunes, to have a good time, to succeed, as we call it, and the like. It is our life; and we intend, of course, to spend it on ourselves. But it is not yours, says Jacob, it is God's; and it is given you, not for yourself at all, but that you may be helpful to your fellow-men. 'I would I were an orange tree, that busy plant,' sings one of our own poets. And here we have that same vivid metaphor, a vine heavily laden, covering the whole wall, each branch of it weighed down with clusters, and even running out far over the road, so that anybody passing can put out a hand and take, and go upon his way refreshed. That is what we are here for. Even this worldling, at the end of his own sordid and pushful days, saw clearly that was the one type of life worth living. Give the boy that, he prayed.

And in the Testament, as we watch Jesus Christ spending Himself so eagerly for any one, unable to keep out of other people's trouble, growing tired through carrying utter strangers' burdens, and all so happily and heartily, and obviously finding it a real gladness to Himself—we know that that is life, real life, life as it should be lived. And yet we are not imitating it, not much, not closely, not where it would pinch. We can't be bothered; the cost is too heavy; always we keep slipping back into that old stupid fallacy that it is our life and, of course, intended primarily to be spent upon ourselves, and that those other people are a nuisance and an intrusion. And yet Christ's way of it is not just a lovely thing out of a fairy story, not really to be looked for in this muddy, workaday world of ours. It is the test against which we are judged. We, too, must use our days like that. And believe me, declares Browning, when your life is over, and you lie looking back at it, it will seem a drab and dull and empty business for all its rush and bustle, and only here and there will your eyes light on something that gleams out. Yes, that was where you turned aside with helpfulness to some one else. And look! see for yourself—already all the rest is tarnished and has faded, and is dead, and only that blooms on. 'Let my son be like a vine, smothered in clusters, and with branches running out over the wall where any one can take.'

I want you, says Christ, to be to others something of what you have found in Me. People are tired and thirsty, the staring sun

beats down on their baked, shadowless life, dust-storms have blinded and half choked them, the sand beneath their limping feet feels hot as fire. In such case you have never found Me fail you. Don't fail them. As in Me you have come upon a well of cool and living water, see that in your heart there bubbles up another such at which they can refresh themselves, that in you they have one to whom they feel it matters, who is not outside it all but in it with them, who has a large and leisured sympathy that has time to attend to them and puts that first. They are so weary and dusty and foot-sore, these endless passers-by upon the hot, hard road, let your branches lean invitingly across the wall to them. And strange things will happen.

¶ Tagore says with assurance that once he saw, resting gratefully in the meagre shadow of his branches, a stranger, who yet somehow seemed familiar. He was grey with tire, for all day He had been out in the hot sun helping people, and Tagore at first did not recognize Him, and was passing carelessly on, when something made him turn his head to take a second glance, and his heart stood still, for he knew it was God!

To be of use to Jesus Christ! What can we conceive to lay alongside that in our boldest day-dreams. And in His infinite condescension He has put that marvellous possibility within the reach of every one of us.

3. But there is a deeper thought still in Jacob's day-dream, a thought that tells of long experience and an intimate knowledge of these unstable hearts of ours. Out of all possible lives unhesitatingly he had chosen for his favourite, not ease, not comfort, not success, but helpfulness. Yet he knew well that if his son was to accept and live out that proud destiny, and really put his days to those high ends, he would require some constant inspiration, some sure and perennial source of idealism, something to sting him out of lesser ways, or else inevitably he would in time fall into step with the conventions round him, be dragged down to the standards of the common herd, forget his dreams, and end by putting through his life as cheaply and as tamely as the rest. Let him be like a vine. Aye, but vines wither in the breathless swelter of the midday heat. And if this life is to be green and fruitful when



others fade, and brown, and die, through that terrible mid-time of life when so many souls fall out and perish, it must be near a spring whose waters will come seeping through the hot, dry, dusty earth, and find its roots, and keep it fresh and vigorous. And that is true. As Browning has it, 'the real God function,' what we need God for most, is not to show us what our lives should be, nearly so much as 'to furnish a motive' for doing what we know already. We must have something that lays compulsion on us to be what in our hearts we quite agree we ought to be, something so haunting that it won't be forgotten, so strong that we can't resist it, and so persistent that there is no possible escape. Many things can do that for us in measure. But religion has been far the most efficient. And nothing in any religion has proved to have anything like such masterful power as the Cross of Jesus Christ. Somehow that grim thing grips the heart; it calls, and one has got to go; it lays on us compelling hands that won't shake off. Do we feel nothing? Are we too small to feel the thrill of it? Can we look at it unconcernedly, and turn back to our own petty hopes, and puny goals, and starveling dreams?

Before we make our final choice of a life let us be certain that we have seen things in the light of the Cross. How that light changes everything! God, whom we had resented as an intrusion in our life—look at Him upon Calvary, and who can keep from loving One who has first so loved us? Our fellow-men, whom we had thought so small, so irritating, so upsetting, with their wretched plans that will clash against ours—how great and wonderful they are beside the Cross, for Jesus Christ has died for them, for each of them, counting them worth His all. Our own life—consider it in that revealing light, and is it not too big a thing to squander upon the poor little dreams to which we meant to give it? And look! why, surely it is not our life at all, but His who bought it at how vast a price. Seeing things as they really are, must we not also lift our hands, and looking up into that dying face, cry out, 'I too am Thine; and, please God I will live for Thee, and live like Thee, so help me, Christ, my Christ!'

## The Victory of God

Gen. I. 19, 20.—'And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.'

A DAY came when the ten sons of Jacob stood before the Prime Minister of Egypt, and realized how true it is that 'the whirligig of time brings in its revenges.' They learned that the high official before whom they stood was none other than the boy whom twenty years before they had sold into slavery. They expected to hear fierce words of condemnation, and even worse; instead they listened to a generous message of forgiveness. Though Joseph reminds them of their wickedness, he recognizes that remorse has done its work in their hearts; and so he bids them look away from themselves and their sin to God, who is behind every event; who guides and controls all human affairs; who has been overruling all his and their actions for the common good. 'God sent me before you,' he says to them, 'to preserve you a remnant in the earth and to save you alive by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God.' Several years later, when Jacob their father had died, and they feared that Joseph might now take vengeance upon them, they came to him in an attempt to placate him. But they found no trace of anger or resentment in their distinguished brother. Instead, they hear him re-affirm his conviction of the over-ruling Providence of God in his life: 'Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye meant evil against me; but God meant it for good. . . .'

1. Two motives toward magnanimity are suggested here, two things that helped Joseph to forgive. One of these motives which powerfully moved Joseph was that God was at work upon those who had injured him. 'Am I in the place of God, that I should take revenge?' It was as if he said: This work of punishment is none of my business. It is a perilous position for any man to take up that he is the instrument of the judgment of God. There are crimes that are far too big for us to assess. God is working out there beyond us, in the hearts of those who have wronged us as well as in our own. His mills are grinding out resistlessly the judgments

of righteousness. The justice of God is a net from which no evil-doer can escape. George Eliot in *Romola* gives us a terrible picture of a man tracked down by his sin. The father he had wronged becomes possessed by a passion of hate, whose haunting persistence turns the blood cold. It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of a hate like that. There is only one thing more terrible, and that is to be the hater himself. For hate desolates both wronged and wrong-doer. But the justice of God is far more sure and unerring, for it is the justice of love, a love that will not let men go, but follows them still through all the wandering mazes of their flight from it, till it brings them face to face with sin, that it may bring them to redemption. It is this vision of God behind the scenes that calms the heart and takes away the restless heat of rancour and revenge. When a man is sure of God and has seen a vision of the love which is justice, his soul is swept clean of all bitterness.

But another thing made it easy for Joseph to lay aside the past and rise above the pettiness of a puny revenge. He had seen how God was handling the wrongs he had suffered, to make them work together for good. He had been cruelly treated by his brothers, taken a helpless youth and sold into slavery, but that wrong did not stand alone in his mind. It had become the vital link in a chain of events which had made him Prime Minister of Egypt. He saw again through the mist of years his father's broken heart as he bowed his head to the inevitable and looked into a grave. But that picture did not stand alone. For that mysterious fate that snatched away Jacob's son, swung back in his old age to rescue him from starvation, and bring him to the proudest day of his life. God was working ceaselessly, taking the savage wrongs and building them up into the structure of a mighty purpose for Joseph and for the world. Can we wonder that his soul was lit with gratitude and worship which swept all bitterness clean out of his life? It did not abate in his mind one jot of his brothers' sin. They had done it and done it deliberately. It was not God's will that they should wrong their brother for his good. They sinned against their brother and they sinned against God. But God took the wrong they did and used it for His purpose, adapting it, out of His loving power, to His great design. Against the background of

their treachery, dark and bloody as it was, there shone out a victorious love, riding upon the storm and triumphing through the catastrophe. 'Ye meant evil unto me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass as it is this day, to save much people alive.'

2. Now does not this experience of Joseph throw a wonderful light upon the darkness which shrouds many a life to-day? There is a problem which is ever with us, the problem of the evil of the world and the goodness of God. How can the evil of our life be reconciled with the goodness of God? There is a whole host of problems here which are too deep for us. But there is light in this word of Joseph. The root of the trouble for many people, when we come to look into it, is a wrong view of Providence. We are still living in Old Testament days, when the blessing of God was bound up with prosperity and a shallow sort of happiness. We think of Providence as a power of love which looks after us as a mother looks after her toddling child, and keeps it out of harm's way. We forget that we are not children any more, but men and women whom God is training to play a big part somewhere, and training to give Him back a love which shall be strong and independent and worthy of His own. That means a hard school and a long schooling. What a tremendous thing is this love of His—a thing so wonderful that it will use every kind of means to make us what we are able to be, even the graving tool of pain and the hammer-blows of misfortune—a love which can adapt anything in the experience of such a world as this to its great designs!

¶ 'I wish I had never been made,' cries a woman bitterly in one of George Macdonald's books. She had met a sudden sorrow and was filled with a hurt resentfulness. To which her friend quietly replies: 'My dear, you're not made yet. You're only being made—and you are quarrelling with the Maker's process.'

One thing, too, we must be clearer about, and that is God's relation to the evil that happens to us. A good many people have the fixed idea that it is God who is directly behind all that comes to them. 'God took him,' they will say when their child dies through accident or disease, and they either resign themselves to what they think the will of God in a resignation which brings peace, even at the cost of truth;



or else they become bitter, thinking hard thoughts of God, as if, somehow, He need not have done this if He had had a little more love or been a little more attentive to their case. There is a half-truth here when a mother says of her dead boy, 'God took him.' God took him, indeed, but only when death had released him, but that is not to say that God engineered the cause which killed him.

Calamities come in many ways. Sometimes they come through sheer accident—a storm at sea, a passing sickness, and the like. But when we look into these things, what are they? They are just the other side of the privilege and the joy of living in such a world as this. It is just the possibility of joy that brings the possibility of pain. If we had no nerves which could throb with exquisite pain we could never thrill with exquisite joy. If there were no spice of risk in life there would be no zest of adventure. The sickness, and the risk, and the calamities which happen by sea and land, are just the price we pay for the privilege of vital living.

¶ Aldous Huxley in his *Brave New World* has given us the picture of a world from which, by the application of science, all pain and trouble have been eliminated. There is a beneficent drug, called 'soma' which every one takes to smooth away the rough edges of life. 'It is Christianity without tears,' declares the Controller of the world proudly. But a voice breaks out in protest: 'The tears are necessary. You get rid of them. You just abolish the slings and arrows. It's too easy. I don't want comfort. I want God. I want real danger. I want freedom.' 'But you'll be very unhappy,' replies the Controller. To which the other retorts, 'I claim the right to be unhappy.'

And there is evil which comes through the sin and malice of others or their callousness and neglect. Are we going to make God responsible for these? If a nurse is careless of her patient, shall we blame God for his death? If a surgeon's hand is unsteady, shall we accuse God of callousness? If a nation forgets the duty of neighbourliness and grows big with lust of power, and wrecks the earth with high explosives, shall we call it an act of God? When Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, was it God's doing or God's will? The injury others have the power to do us is the price we pay for those social relationships which make

the world fragrant when they are sweet and loving, and poison it with bitterness when they break down. When these things are done we can be sure of this, they are done in defiance of God's will. They are done in spite of the pleading voices and guiding light within, by which God seeks to win men to the higher way. And when they are done, they are part of a Cross which God carries in His heart, the Cross of love resisted, of righteousness defied, of truth dishonoured.

3. But there is another thing we need to grasp, and this is the point, God is not helpless amid the wreckage of His plans. The world is no derelict ship. Our broken lives are not lost though they have been driven from their course. God's love is working still, and He comes in and takes the wrong that was done and the calamity that came, no matter how, and uses them victoriously, working out His wonderful plan of love. That is God's victory.

History is full of examples of this very miracle of the victorious Love. How many lives have been redeemed from failure into a splendid success! Here is a woman whose life has been crippled by sorrow, and she becomes the foundress of a hospital. Here is a man whose career is blasted by blindness, and he gives himself up, body and soul, to work for the blind as if he had been equipped for this very hour and this very work. Or here is Paul, taken by cruel hands, which would have crushed him as they would have crushed a fly, and flung into a prison at Rome; and he makes that prison a pulpit from which his words resound through Europe. It was not God who shut him in that prison. But it was God who used that prison.

¶ In a cemetery in the Adirondack Mountains is to be found the grave of Edward Livingston Trudeau who, as a young man, was stricken with tuberculosis. When he was forced to leave his practice in New York it was thought that he had only a short time to live. Yet this frail man established the Adirondack Cottage Sanatorium for the treatment of incipient consumption in working men and women, an institution that has been a model the world over, and continued his noble work for mankind for a period of more than forty years.

The supreme example, of course, is the Cross of Christ Himself. The love of God took up the treachery of Judas and the cruelty of men

defying love, and made them the means of a sacrifice by which love conquers the world. They meant it unto evil against Him. It was not God's will that they should do it. Let us get rid of that thought. It was God's agony. It was God's crucifixion; but God meant it, shaped it, redeemed it unto good to save much people alive.

¶ In that classic about boyhood, Richard Jefferies' book *Bevis*, we find this: 'The crucifixion hurt his feelings very much: the cruel nails, the unfeeling spear; he looked at the picture a long time, and then turned over the page saying, "If God had been there He would not have let them do it."' If God had been there! For a Christian, dramatic irony can go no further, since the whole of the Christian religion rests on the fact that God *was* there; the Cross is the mightiest of the mighty acts of God. Out of this supreme manifestation of evil and in terms of its very stuff, has come the sublimest and most triumphant manifestation of good. What is intrinsically and in isolation a terrible crime, has come to be the occasion of the world's greatest blessing.<sup>1</sup>

4. But there is a final point we must notice. This victory of God does not always happen. It is not inevitable. Before we can understand it, we have to think of Joseph and see the kind of man he was. If Joseph had got bitter, if he had said to himself when he was wronged, that it was useless trying to do anything with his life which had been so shamefully marred, he would have ended his days a slave. But Joseph stood up to his trouble, and kept his faith clear, and his life clean towards God. He kept himself in touch with the Almighty love, linked himself up with the Almighty will, and looked for chances of helping out the purpose he was sure God still had for him. And that alertness, that faith, that willingness to co-operate with God and to make the best of every situation because he knew God could help him make the best of it, were the means by which God's love at last made him what he became.

If God is to be victorious through our broken lives, we must put ourselves into His hands. We must rise to the call of His purpose at every turn that offers. We must, in fact, take everything as if it came from Him and see in everything the workings of His love. For,

<sup>1</sup> J. S. Whale, *The Problem of Evil*, 68.

indeed, everything does become the working of love when we put life into the hands of God. That is the glorious fact. As Mr Clutton-Brock puts it, 'Salvation is seeing that the Universe is good, and becoming a part of that goodness'; or, as Paul puts it, 'All things work together for good to them that love God.' In other words, those who accept the purpose of God in Christ and give themselves to it in loyal faith and service, find there the secret of a continual victory—a victory in which life, with all it holds of joy or woe, becomes subdued to the mighty mastery of love. 'And this is the victory that overcomes the world.'

### Man's Evil, God's Good

Gen. 1. 20.—'As for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.'

LITTLE men cannot understand great men; they think all others are at heart even as themselves. Joseph's brethren never really believed that he had fully forgiven them. While Jacob was alive, they thought that Joseph's affection for their father must have restrained him; but when at last Jacob died, then said Joseph's brethren: 'Peradventure Joseph will now hate us and requite us all the evil which we did unto him.' So they went to their brother in the old abject way, concocted a plausible tale—how their father had left a message begging Joseph to forgive their sin against him—and prostrated themselves at his feet.

Then Joseph in one broad flash gives them his philosophy of Providence and of life, and says to them: 'Fear not; am I in the place of God? As for you, doubtless ye thought evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring to pass, even as it is this day, to save much people alive!' As though he had said: 'I know the malice and littleness of your lives; your jealousy and meanness of spirit; your cruelty and hardness of heart to me long ago. You meant to destroy me, and you did your best to do so. But I see, too, that God was in that very thing. He had a hand in it all. What you meant for evil, He meant for good to me, to you, and others. I cannot explain how this could be; but I see that so it was. It was not merely that He over-ruled this evil



thing, this treachery and cruelty; He was in it all; and this is the issue—that I was delivered and set in a broad path, and that a nation, including yourselves, was saved from destruction.'

1. We see here a clear recognition of the two great facts of human experience—good and evil, evil and good—in their eternal contrast and contradiction. 'Ye thought evil against me; God meant it for good.' There they stand, these two words, representing the two extremes of the moral world.

We used to hear a good deal in pre-war days about evil being good in the making; about sin as the shadow of holiness. There is not much talk of that kind in the world to-day. It is being bitten into the very soul of man that evil and good are not substance and shadow, a 'positive' and a 'negative,' a fullness on the one side and a vacuum or emptiness on the other; but that goodness and evil are two spiritual forces that pull and push against each other for ever in deadly enmity, in stern, strong reality. Evil is a bad will acting positively from one side; goodness is a good will acting positively from the other, and these are in eternal clash and conflict. There was never a truce between these deadly foes yet since the beginning of time; the tension and struggle between them is constant, unremitting, irreconcilable. This eternal opposition and warfare between good and evil, right and wrong, sin and holiness, is the great foundation-principle of God's moral government.

2. The text shows how closely these two incompatible principles are interwoven in human experience. That is the tragedy and glory of life—that it is the arena on which these two spiritual forces join issue and wage their warfare. Joseph was constantly, at every turning-point of life, meeting the two; they were always closely interwoven in experience, yet eternally diverse in nature. The cruelty of his brethren; the treachery of Potiphar's wife; the ingratitude of the chief butler, who promised to intercede for Joseph when he left the prison, but who forgot him as soon as he was out—such was the evil he had experienced. Then, on the other side, there was the good too; everywhere an opportunity of service, recognition and kindness, love and loyalty; so that

he was never without friends, never without his chance of betterment and promotion. And that is a picture of life on a small scale. We move between these eternal contrasts in a sense; in another they are as the warp and weft of a loom intricately intermingled, so that often we cannot tell which is which; and the shuttle of every man's will plays unceasingly between the two, and weaves the garment of his character for weal or woe.

3. We are given a glimpse into the relation which God holds to these two moral incompatibles of good and evil. And here comes the chief point of the text. 'Surely,' says Joseph, 'ye thought evil against me; but God meant it for good.' That is to say, 'Man's evil may become God's good.'

We are brought up against the great moral mystery of the universe: What is God's relation to the evil that is in the world? Is it here against His will? If so, is He powerless against it? Or is it here by His tolerance and permission? Does He, then, share in its guilt since He, being all-powerful, can at any moment annihilate it? Or is it here in some strange and mysterious way by His ordinance, and is He going to use it for His good ends? Is it something which has to be, though God is eternally against it, in order that He may bring to pass good ends which otherwise even God could not reach and realize?

Whichever theory we adopt, we are met with such difficulties as to lead us into blank contradictions of thought. Our only way is to appeal to experience, to history, and see how things work out practically in the Providence of God. And we get our answer there: an answer which is nowhere better expressed than in these words of Joseph.

'You,' says Joseph to his conscience-stricken brethren, 'thought evil against me, but God meant it for good.' Yes, these men had meant evil to him; their action was mean, cruel, despicable, in the fullest sense; there was no excuse possible. But they were not the only actors in the drama. God used this very act of cruelty and treachery and every similar experience in Joseph's life, as the means of his advancement, and through it he worked a great deliverance to the very men who had done the wrong, and to a great nation. The sin was made the means to the furtherance of a

great good. Such is the lesson of Joseph's career.

4. Just now we see the apparent triumph of evil. The dark ages are come back on us. The world is a cauldron of evil passions, hatreds, enmities. The heavens are black with the cloud of men's iniquities. History tells us of nothing more horrible, more diabolical than the story of this war. What are we to say to it all?

As regards the arch-sinner—Germany—we can only say, 'As for you, ye thought evil against us.' For years she has been laying her schemes, preparing her materials, carrying on her diplomacies, and hatching her plot against surrounding nations. There is now no shadow of doubt about that. But already we can see that that is not all. She is not the only actor in the drama; nor are her opponents. There is another Hand, another Will at work, whose purpose is being slowly accomplished through it all. We can only see it dimly at present; but light is breaking through here and there; and presently we shall see more and more clearly His footsteps in the storm. As a nation we are sounding deep waters and learning great lessons—lessons of self-sacrifice, helpfulness, tolerance and goodwill.

¶ The Senior Chaplain of the First Canadian Division—Colonel Kent—recently returned from this country to his own land. He commented on the high courage of the civilians over here, and then said this: 'Never was Britain a more Christian country than she is to-day. There is more unselfishness, more care for the unfortunate, the helpless, the homeless and the distracted than ever there has been in the country's long history. There is less class distinction, less insistence upon privilege, less flaunting of riches in the face of poverty. And there are more people on their knees in Britain than there have ever been. Not because they are afraid, but because this struggle and suffering have thrown them back upon the ultimate realities of life which are spiritual.'<sup>1</sup>

5. Joseph's final triumph over the untoward elements of his lot was not worked by any automatic law of Providence. He did not become Prime Minister of Egypt by the mere force of circumstances. This good thing came to him because he threw his own will and

<sup>1</sup> G. H. Clothier.

energy and manly character into the scale. From the human standpoint he was a self-made man; he rose to power in virtue of his industry, his faithfulness, his wisdom, his devotion to duty. That, however, was only half the story. What really raised Joseph to greatness was the fact that he gave himself wholly into the hand of God, and loyally worked with the Divine purpose that had chosen him for such great ends. If one of these two factors—the Divine and the human—had failed, the issue would have been very different. Because they were co-ordinated into an indissoluble unity, this wonderful result ultimately came about.

What is true on the scale of a single life is no less true on the larger scale of human history. This is the secret of all progress, that men should master the eternal laws of well-being and earnestly co-operate with the spiritual forces that work for the great ends of life. The trouble is that neither men nor nations do this except uncertainly and fitfully, and the result is, as we see it in history—a slow and uncertain advance, checked by frequent lapses and reversals. Only when mankind works with God in bringing about His beneficent ends are these ends surely accomplished. When will our poor self-willed race learn this lesson? When will men individually and racially join forces with the Divine in the great redemptive purpose of the ages? Till they do, this world will move only with painful steps and slow, and there will be many tragedies by the way; but when once this happy partnership with the Divine will is firmly knit and faithfully honoured, it will be found that the Utopia of man's dreams will be a Utopia no longer, but we shall have a 'new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.'

## A Coffin in Egypt

Gen. I. 26.—'He was put in a coffin in Egypt.'

THE last words of Genesis describe not only the ending of a great career: they mark the close of an epoch in man's history. Genesis, the book of the beginnings, surveys the races of mankind, only to dismiss them one by one, in order that the record may follow the fortunes of one race and concentrate our interest upon the



story of the seed of Abraham. It eliminates subordinate characters, keeping before us the main line, the Divinely chosen succession. At length we reach the point at which the chosen representative passes out of the pastoral life in which hitherto the tribe had lived, and crosses into the more complex life of Egyptian civilization. Joseph's adventures and temptations show us how God's people stood the test of emergence from the shadows of simple pastoral life into the glare of Egypt. And now, the great servant of God is dead. 'He was put in a coffin.' As we are brought up against the ending of a great career and realize that 'wise men also die and perish together, as well as the ignorant and foolish,' we are in danger of falling into the doleful reflection of the writer of Ecclesiastes, 'There is one event to the righteous and to the wicked.' And, therefore, it is not unprofitable to face the sobering truth steadily while we can, instead of waiting till the loss of someone who filled a large part of our horizon forces us with a shock to realize it, perhaps with little courage and faith.

1. 'He was put in a coffin.' The human mind resorts to every expedient to evade the conclusion 'I must die.' Every artifice of language is employed to disguise or paraphrase that dread truth. But spiritual writers have realized that this is the fundamental thing which must be brought home to each one of us.

Why must we let this shadow fall across our lives? It is because the shadow is essential to the proportions of the Picture. If once we realize that death does close a vista, does set a term to our activities, does limit our opportunities, we shall get things into proper focus, we shall see life as it really is—a pilgrimage. If there is one thing more than another which the Bible impresses upon us, it is that our time in this world is no more than a sojourn, that we are strangers and pilgrims. And it is certain that whenever the Church has lost that true perspective and proportion, corruption has set in. Deterioration came in when we began to think of ourselves as 'established,' settled, in a world where we were intended to be travellers. It is interesting to observe how witness to this truth has perpetuated itself and survived in unlikely quarters. Our word 'parish,' the very symbol of all that is fixed, set, permanent and enduring, is directly traceable to the word which

St Peter uses about 'pilgrim.' The 'par-oikia' is the resting-place, the camp, but not the permanent abode, of the Christian traveller.

¶ The old-fashioned truth remains that we are strangers and pilgrims here, even though we may not, like Archbishop Leighton, feel that it is fitting we should die in an inn (a wish strangely granted him). Gustav Frenssen begins one of his remarkable village sermons with two simple incidents from his pastoral experience. The first is that of a little boy crying in the street, unable to say where he lived or even to give an intelligible name. The other scene is that of an old woman dying, and as she looks round on the faces of her children and grandchildren without recognition, she says 'Nothing but strange faces!' He makes these incidents a symbol of man's state when, sooner or later, he is detached from the familiar but transient things of this world and brought face to face with 'the deepest things' that are rooted in eternity. How will it seem to us when *we* are asked, 'Who are you and where do you live?' From this point of view the inscriptions on the monuments of church and graveyard are a strange comment on the Christian life, dwelling as they so often do on the familiar things of earth, its now forgotten achievements and irrelevant pride. There is something wrong with the emphasis of our life if such things figure largely in our own minds or those of our friends, when the time comes for us to die.<sup>1</sup>

2. 'He was put in a coffin.' But as we read, we think—How little of him, after all, was put in the coffin! Only his mortal remains were deposited there. His influence persisted and was never allowed to die.

Think for a moment of that marvellous thing we call 'Influence'! As its name reminds us, it was originally thought of as a kind of current flowing in from the stars. We have an echo of this in the Book of Job—'the sweet influences of the Pleiades.' But it is a force infinitely more subtle than that, and it is a force which goes on, and sometimes gains added strength, even after death. We can most of us think of writers or pioneers of thought whose influence only began to be felt after they were put in a coffin. And there is the wonderful persistence which is displayed by the influence of a good father or mother. Long after they are gone,

<sup>1</sup> H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Veil of God*, 97.

their influence will remain, often achieving what their bodily presence failed to accomplish, steadying, aiding by unseen pressure those who were deprived of their living presence.

¶ The prowess of Robert Bruce at Stirling and Bannockburn is written in song and chronicle; but long after his body had returned to dust, the Scottish army bore his reliquary aloft in battle with the cry, 'The Heart of Bruce!' and by the magic of his name redeemed the day.

3. 'He was put in a coffin.' But that is not a full account of the matter. For there is another factor to consider. Besides Influence there is also Interest. Joseph, you will remember, when his time of departure approached, was given one of those strange glimpses into the future which sometimes seem to come to those who are about to leave this world behind. He foresaw that a time would come when God would visit His people, and they should be restored to their old home. He gave instruction, sealed by oath, that when that time should come, they should take up his bones and carry them into Canaan, a promise which was redeemed centuries later at the Exodus.

Here was the longing to be identified with the fortunes of his people. Was it a blind longing for immortality? Whatever we may call it, we can say this, that Death and its approach did not impair the interest of the patriot in the future of the race. He must be with them, even though only by ensuring that his relics shared their wanderings and their final resting-place.

We are conscious, at times, if not always, of the continued interest which the departed feel in our progress. We sometimes say of reform or beneficial developments that they would have rejoiced the hearts of those who prepared the way for them. Is it unreasonable to believe that they do rejoice the hearts of God's saints? 'There is joy in the presence of the angels': surely also our triumphs bring a thrill of joy to the hosts of those 'victors who o'ercame.'

4. 'He was put in a coffin in Egypt.' But not a grave in Egypt! Is it not reasonable to suggest that Christian people may see their faith and hope foreshadowed by this unburied coffin? Joseph died, but the fact that he was never buried was a constant assurance of coming deliverance. Christ also died—but how immeasurably He has transcended the symbolism of that primitive revelation! He died—but there was no grave in all the earth that could contain Him. He died—but He rose again! Does an unburied coffin not imply an empty tomb? And is an empty tomb not the foundation fact of our Christian faith?

The unburied coffin is, of course, a poor anticipation of the empty tomb. But are they not both alike in this? Do they not both testify to the fact of redemption, and confirm the promise of a God-appointed destiny? The unburied coffin of Joseph was to Israel a constant witness to their hope of Canaan. The empty grave is to us the assurance of salvation, and the herald of heavenly glory. 'Because I live, ye shall live also!'



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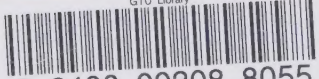
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